

2003

Parnassus 2003

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Parnassus
2003



Parnassus



2003

Taylor University

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Fiction

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Essay

Paul J. Willis is professor of English at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. He is the author of two novels, *No Clock in the Forest* and *The Stolen River*, a chapbook of poems titled *Poison Oak*, and numerous essays, which appear in such publications as *Books and Culture*, *River Teeth*, and the *OE Journal*.

Poetry

Scott Cairns, Associate Professor of English at the University of Missouri, has published five volumes of poetry, including *philokalia: New and Selected Poems*. During the fall of 2002, Scott visited the Upland campus of Taylor University and gave an interview with students Rebekah Denison and Joel Jupp. The interview will appear in next year's issue of *Parnassus*.

Table of Contents

A Conversation with Michael S. Harper and poems

6

Fiction

Taylor Birkey	<i>Boysenberry</i>	18
Lia Angell	<i>Waves of Change</i>	21
Erin McGinty	<i>Everything Changing</i>	26
Sarah Mason	<i>Looking for August</i>	33
Leah Schvaneveldt	<i>Coincidence</i>	41
John Bundick	<i>American Attitudes</i>	48
Lia Angell	<i>Odette/Odile</i>	52
Sarah Shedd	<i>Indian Creek</i>	55
Joe Cressman	<i>Generations</i>	61
Aaron Brosman	<i>The Thousand Fold</i>	66

Essay

Lauren Knapp	<i>Seattle</i>	70
Emily Glass	<i>Notes on Topography</i>	75
Elizabeth Boltz	<i>A Letter to Mr. Jerome David Salinger</i>	80
4 Nick Hayden	<i>The Memory</i>	83
Maura Klopfenstein	<i>Worried About Your Relationships?</i>	90
Amanda Griffith	<i>July 20</i>	92
Bill Green	<i>222 Oak Park Ave.</i>	97
Daniel Peterson	<i>Ergonomics</i>	100
Emily Glass	<i>Adventures of the Naysayer</i>	105
Laurie Susen	<i>Days Gone By</i>	108
Angia Macomber	<i>September 11, 2002</i>	115
Elizabeth Boltz	<i>Sky Writing</i>	116

Poetry

Emily Glass	<i>The Strange Tale of the Lighting...</i>	118
Whitney Vanderwilt	<i>I am from Spicy Carved Elephants</i>	119
Elizabeth Boltz	<i>Rufus</i>	120
Whitney Vanderwilt	<i>Icarus</i>	121
Emily Glass	<i>In Which Addison Poses a Question to God</i>	122
E. C. Newman	<i>Everyday</i>	123
E. C. Newman	<i>Jon in London</i>	124
Lana Gottschalk	<i>A Desert</i>	125
Lana Gottschalk	<i>The Dream</i>	126
Lana Gottschalk	<i>The Transformation</i>	127
Heather Michelle Baker	<i>Cynicism</i>	128
Emily Glass	<i>Selkie</i>	129

Thom Satterlee	<i>Thaddeus Reade, on His Death Bed</i>	130
Heather Michelle Baker	<i>Vicarious</i>	132
E. C. Newman	<i>Stupid Superstitions</i>	133
Brad Johnston	<i>Sea Story</i>	134
Derek Shields	<i>End's Gaze</i>	135
Leslie Anne Wise	<i>Portrait</i>	136
Leslie Anne Wise	<i>for elaine's words</i>	137
John Bundick	<i>The City Bridge, Broken</i>	138
Rebekah Denison	<i>Regent Street, London</i>	139
Rebekah Denison	<i>Fragments</i>	140
Rebekah Denison	<i>In A Boyfriend's Kitchen</i>	141
Rebekah Denison	<i>New Mexico</i>	142
Elaine Friedberg	<i>Summer's Baptism</i>	143
Elaine Friedberg	<i>Orange ViewMaster</i>	144
Nathalie Williams	<i>Dorothy</i>	145
Elaine Friedberg	<i>I'd Have Written This Earlier if...</i>	146
Daniel Peterson	<i>Inspired</i>	148
Daniel Peterson	<i>Writing Poetry</i>	149
David Harrity	<i>About Being Us</i>	150
David Harrity	<i>Days Spent Missing Eden</i>	151
David Harrity	<i>Perishing Midwest Autumn</i>	152
Nathalie Williams	<i>And,</i>	153
Lia Angell	<i>Luck of the Draw</i>	156
Lia Angell	<i>Personless Person</i>	159
Wesley English	<i>Stalking Houses</i>	160
Wesley English	<i>The Silence of Stars</i>	161
Nick Hayden	<i>Sesquipedalism</i>	163
Rebekah Burtness	<i>Cafe California</i>	164
Joel Jupp	<i>Tamed</i>	165
Joel Jupp	<i>Sanctuary</i>	166
Joel Jupp	<i>Two in Pink</i>	167
Joel Jupp	<i>Demythification (To the Pre-Socratics)</i>	168
Joel Jupp	<i>To a Waitress</i>	169
Maura Klopfenstein	<i>Scribbled Lines and X'd-out Spots</i>	170
Natasha K. Fast	<i>Mist of Heaven</i>	171
Natasha K. Fast	<i>No Words</i>	172
Natasha K. Fast	<i>Hope</i>	173
Natasha K. Fast	<i>Through Heaven's Seam</i>	174
Nicole Solak	<i>I'm Just a Statistic</i>	176
David Miller	<i>Open my Eyes</i>	177
David Miller	<i>Fears and Forgiveness</i>	178
Kathleen Skorburg	<i>Tearing Petals Off a Flower</i>	179
Kathleen Skorburg	<i>Ophelia</i>	180
Whitney Vanderwilt	<i>Glissando...</i>	181
Author Biographies		182

A Conversation with Michael S. Harper, January 22, 2002

(edited by Bill Green, transcribed by Lindsay Taylor)

Introduction

Michael S. Harper, a poet and professor of English at Brown University, came to Taylor University as part of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebration. During this time Mr. Harper spoke to selected Taylor classes and collaborated on a jazz lecture with musician Jae Sinnett. Mr. Harper sat down with Taylor students and Parnassus 2002 staff members Lindsay Taylor and Bill Green. The conversation focused on Mr. Harper's writing habits, his thoughts on teaching, and the elements that define his own work. This is an edited transcript of that interview. --Bill Green

Music, particularly jazz, has been very influential in your life. How has this contributed to your choice of being a poet?

I was supposed to take lessons as a child at the Henry St. Settlement but never did because my mother was assisting my grandmother, through a series of progressive strokes, and I was assisting her with the raising of my younger sister; my father was working, and going to law school part time; the result was no lessons, and though I was taught to read before kindergarten, I was an interior child in an urban environment; my father was a Giants fan. I was his oldest son, and therefore, a clone in the midst of Dodger fans; I fought every day, by necessity. I would love to play the piano, but I don't have that kind of talent, so I had to do something else. I went to school with a lot of great musicians, like I spoke about yesterday. My inclination was to capture what I thought was most magnificent about their presentation and most of that was about phrasing. It was about the way in which the phrase was articulated, how it was broken, and what they were talking about. I tried to simulate that into a study in prosody.

How would you describe your technique and influences on your technique?

When you look over poems that I have written, I know what I'm doing, and have known since I've started. The reason why I know is because the people I was trying to emulate were the people who were creating beauty on the spot, most like musicians, and they were magnificent, and they didn't like to repeat themselves. So you had to listen to them live, to hear them on record was not to understand who they were. You had to understand them in the context of a small group, playing behind Billie Holiday, playing with Count Basie, with Hershel Evans (who died to early). What they were doing was listening, paying attention to the lyrics of a song--that is to say, they knew the lyrics, and when they played the melody, they knew the lyrics and they watched the dancers, taking inspiration from the dancers. Now that kind of symbiosis is magnificent, and that's very American.

What advice do you give young writers?

Know what happened really. For writers, like you, you're supposed to know. You're supposed to know more than the people that you write for. Look for good examples; read a lot; don't take yourself seriously; give yourself time to develop; encourage your own voice; this will take years, some luck, depend on mentoring, or its lack. "Poetry chooses you, you don't choose it." As Ralph Ellison said to me, "You're a writer, even when you're not writing."

As a poet, how do you teach your students?

When I teach now I begin by asking my advanced poetry students to write verse exercises. I'm not asking for finished poems, but I want them to work in the traditional conventions. We start with the Petrarchan sonnet. Which is Petrarch. And then we go to the Shakespearean sonnet and the Milton sonnet. I have them write a ballad, and then maybe we go to a ballad, which is the French form. Maybe I'll have them write a villanelle. Maybe I'll give them a break and give them one of the refrain lines. I'll say look, you can steal one of the refrain lines from the blues, so you don't have to come up with two. The problem with any refrain line is that many of these lines that they choose are not repeatable. You know, the most important thing about a ballad is having something that you can repeat over and over again. If it's not what we call sermonic, something that can be reiterated, if you can't select that, well maybe you need some teachers. So, each one of these verse exercises, they have to have an example, and they select the example or maybe I give it to them, and then they write a commentary and they tell me why their poem was not an 'A' poem and they know, because they got an example. And then, they put them away in their portfolio and they move on to the next thing. And this is done in the same time that we are reading discrete books, not anthologies, usually speaking, even though I have edited some, I try and keep them away from them because we have a good learning library.

I had no mentoring as I was growing up, other than my parents, I never had a black teacher, so I worked out my methods out of my own ignorance. Man of my teachers didn't believe in teaching writing. I went to Iowa Writers Workshop because I couldn't get to "Paris," applied for a passport and got a draft notice, and since I was deferred as a student, applied to Iowa in mid-year. I was very green, only twenty-two, and "ignorant" of everything important, including a good library. At Brown we have a non-lending "Harris" collection. I try to "trick" by students into spending time there, reading first editions, leave "fresh space" for later creation.

What role do books play in your classroom?

I have an extensive reading list, required and books on reserve. I bring books

michael s. harper

to my students because I want them to know that they are references. I bring these in and I say, these are useful to you if you can manage to have them conform to your own sense of what is important.

What writing habits do you have when working on a poem?

This is a steno pad. I always have one with me; I have a bunch of them. I start one but then I never finish it. Then I'll find another one. I look back and I just can't believe some of the things I have written. I say, "What was I thinking about then?" So, I start with a pad. I get an idea, and I just start writing it down, on the back of an envelope or whatever. Then, I have a longer yellow pad which I sometimes write on when I'm going to a place where I'm never going to be disturbed, a place where there isn't a phone. Let's say it's the writing colony, and I'll just immerse myself in some subject.

While you are here at Taylor you asked for a typewriter. What part does this play in the process?

I took a typing class in junior high and was proficient. I still write in long-hand, then transfer to typewriter. The computer is a holding tank. I don't compose on it. I do do e-mail. A typewriter, on hand, gives me the chance to translate my thoughts at the moment, or almost so. This makes a difference. Now, when I'm visiting, or on the road, I have time to write a brief postcard, or a note I wanted to write, or to answer mail, or pay bills. I'm a contingent person, and like people. Try to capture what they say, do, or make me say or do.

What does the typewriting give you that a computer lacks?

I need phrasing, I need the tactile sensation of writing something. I need the sound of the keys.

I'm afraid of computers, the Internet, instant communication, e-mail because I am whimsical in the extreme and need the time to find out what I really think. This comes from rewriting. Computers give the illusion that you don't need to revise, or you revise by "moving words around" rather than reconceiving impulse.

What are your other habits concerning disciplining yourself to write?

If you give me a minute or two, I would sometimes be on break, let's say I was teaching a course and it was a three-hour course with a break in the middle. If I was close to my office, I would go and write something, and sometimes it would have nothing to do with the class. I would get an idea and I would say to myself, if I don't write this down it's gonna be gone, and I'd write it down. Then I'd come back and I

can't remember what it is. I got the epiphany but I don't have the context. And invariably, if I wrote it down, it would come again. If I didn't write it down, sometimes it wouldn't. So I learned something about my own habits.

I don't write enough these days, and certainly not enough creative writing. Lots of recommendations, et al. As I get older it gets harder, there is still the blank page, and I'm sometimes "strangled" in incoherence.

Do you have other habits as a poet?

My habits are like my person: mostly bad. I'm a note taker and a note keeper. Most people who know me want to clean up my office, my various desks, newspapers/magazines. In other words: my life as I know it. I keep records of all kinds of things and when someone goes through my papers, God help him. They're going to have to make sense out of this. Because I'm a tinkerer, I do all kinds of things. I write on the backs of envelopes, I write on all kinds of stuff. You know, I'll be flying on a plane and something will come to me and I'll use whatever.

What do you feel is the importance in keeping records?

Yeats said, "Memories are old identities." How else find out who you were but by figuring out "who you are."

9

Is this dialogue with the people still needed?

Poems are in dialogue with what you've read and have not read, that's tradition. I've forgotten more of what I read than what I remember, but I am a remembrancer. Hayden said that and I agree.

When language is set up in binary opposition like black, white, right, wrong, it is very often used as a tool for oppression, pitting one thing against the other. How do you, having a much more holistic view of language, fight against that in your poetry?

Ralph Ellison called it "trained incapacity." What he meant was that the language has inherent in it an endpoint of resolution, which is implicit in the way in which language is structured. Remember when I was talking about phrasing before? One of the reasons why I was very much concerned about having a different model for my own discourse than the ones taught in classes was because there was so much schizophrenia in the language. I wanted to bind up these kind of fragments into something that was whole. I came up with an idea of what I would call the use and misuse of the periodic sentence. Now the periodic sentence is a way of storing details and withholding from your audience the verb and the noun that you need to finish the thought.

michael s. harper

And the more you withhold it the more they are attentive to the buildup. So, often times my theory of increment is withhold this until you finally have all the information you need to make a resolution

Your poetry uses repetition of the language as well. What is your influence for this?

You notice that I use repetition. Many people don't. I learned it from musicians. "Incremental" from the Latin for "increasing"--a repetitive structural device found in anonymous English and Scottish ballads, whose lines and stanzas are repeated with the key changes in important words. Hence, why I ask my students to write ballads. I want them to learn this.

Before leaving, you have brought several poems, Mr. Harper, would you share one and the story behind it?

I was reading the New York Times one morning and a guy walked into a kind of common area where I was sitting. The guy was looking at me and he watched the expression on my face change. He didn't know what I was reading. So, he walked up to me and he said, You know your face has just changed. And I said, Yeah, I said, I'm reading the obituary of Jacob Lawrence--who I had never met. He sat down and he said, I didn't know he had passed. And I said, It's just in the obituaries in today's Times. He died the day before yesterday. He said, When I was a young person (meaning a teenager) Jacob Lawrence was my teacher. And he said...he told me his story. This was not a story...we had never talked about this and we had known each other for years. We had...this is teaching me a lesson about commonality. You think you know people and then all of a sudden an occasion happens and you share things that you wouldn't ordinarily have picked up except that someone has died. So, I said to myself, If I don't write this, I won't write. So I went right up and got on my typewriter at 5 P.M. and wrote this poem. It's in couplets. I'm just going to read this poem, it's called "Use Trouble". Lawrence used to teach these little workshops. He always loved to teach the kids. One time he was teaching a little kid and he said, "How are things going?" and the little kid said, "I'm in a lot of trouble." Imagine a little kid about 8 or 9 and remember what I said about things being beaten out of children when they are very young. She was sharing whatever they were doing, cartoons or drawing whatever and he was critiquing these kids. So, here's the poem, "Use Trouble" for Jacob Armstead Lawrence 1917-2000.

You told this to the children
when they confessed their works

were incomplete your dignity grace
a mapped space for trouble

your migration series at 23
synaptic code for having nothing

as you built off the backs of the poor
your symmetries where paint was talk

"gumbo yaya" Hayden (your collaborator)
coined it about his native paradise valley

a nourishment of the Detroit ghetto
while you were content with Harlem

a sixty-block walk to MOMA
for filial instruction

of the Italian Renaissance:
now in Seattle they lay you down

those parts Indian of your heritage
in Chief Seattle's words

migraines at gunpoint
bullet-ridden love songs as migrants

to the highest plane
a vast battlefield of tones

over vegetation of the visible
where there is no insurance

yet in retrospective fantasy
to remake the spirit in your name

Faculty Study #421

Without Charles Churchwell
there would have been no study

I put Coltrane up on the wall
the difficulty of the soprano

a legislation to be passed
in Providence Plantations

and I would not sing on command:
carrying the mace uphill

in the ceremonial past
I conjured presidential

signatures at convocation
[commencement was free]

12 I stacked my study with texts
to teach the innocent and guilty

alike, taking Lincoln
(across the street at John Hay)

as the only beacon I could follow
after Douglass

who raised troops for the union
and should have processed

in formation at Harvard
after St. Gauden's statuary

I can forgive anything
forget nothing

in the annals of slavery
this university is built on

MISS INDIANA: GWEN VOLPE

We are on the inner landscapes of alchemy
and you are wearing your comfortable
boots, taking a break from work,
hair up off the neck, hiding the surface
contact of the attributes of love,
Venus to the philistines, now
the Miss America of service;

between your would-be in-laws
I can see their grandchildren
for such is the avenue of music
in recital, on this campus, in this room
where I am singing of prison
(the execution of words)
where exile is everpresent
unless you are in the hands
of the beloved;

I wish this for you,
trading our boots,
'walking the line'
as centerpiece
to an August wedding;

but this is October:
I will be at Crown Hill
Cemetery in the early morning
"We Free Singers Be"
on the tombstone
of Etheridge Knight Jr.
Son Poet Father Brother;

and his mother, at ninety,
and recently passed,
as black attendants
(working on the graves
in enclosures of shrubbery)

recall Lilly, Gatling, Benjamin Harris,
and in the high view of Dunbar's model,

James Whitcomb Riley from Greenfield.

I am reminded of pharmacist
the artful practitioner,
and of course the science
thereof, but in the archives
of this very campus
where you were trained
and turned away from the piano
pharmacopoeia
a book, especially a book
of authority,
more than a list of medicines
while you heal the sick
perhaps sacrificing
your very self;

the poets of the kalaam
could stabilize the mayflies
and take the periodic table
into one's bloodstream
and heal the sick;

14

I feel this amber drug
in your vena cava;
without the herbs
your work table
your dog no cerberis
even you need protection
in the world;

yet you stand up
'in the service of the beloved'
without a peep from the olive
branch, or the cosmetics
of a bathing suit,
or any clothing for the spirit
from whence you come:

I hear that music
in your speech and carriage;
and you will be protected
so that you can do the world's work:
write that virtuous book

I speak of: play your piano
as virtue in the sunshine,
in the rain.

—Michael S. Harper



Fiction

Boysenberry

His lips were blue and the sweat was running down into his eyes as he watched half the popsicle fall to the ground in a pile of slushy boysenberry. Boysenberry was his favorite flavor. It was even better when it was yogurt. It was an unusually hot autumn morning. Tuesday, he thought. The week before was gray and cold; he had resented having to stay inside to play. He had received colorful picture books and brand new toys for his recent birthday, and, as always, they'd lost appeal within a matter of hours. Today was Tuesday, because Wednesday was tomorrow. The first day of second grade. He wondered if Tommy Legucci would wear the same tow truck overalls as last year. Last year was first grade. He remembered Mrs. Hasselhoff and her spotted smock. She was a funny lady. She let him name the frog. Its name was Hasselhoff.

He lived in this large skyscraper of a building. On the 32nd floor. It was a small apartment, but he had always been able to keep himself amused while his grandmother was at work. And he always had popsicles. He thought that today would be a good day to eat the last one in the box.

18 That's why he was outside. The large entrance to the apartment complex breathed right out onto a busy street where many people walked. The boy enjoyed watching people. The weather was warm. Outside just for a few minutes. To enjoy the last popsicle. No one paid any attention to him anyway. He would go right back up when he was done.

The boy closed his eyes and wished hard that it would be the last day of school tomorrow, not the first. The only people he didn't like were the ones that were his age. He heard close footsteps, honks and yells. Wish harder.

When the boy opened his eyes, he noticed that his popsicle had melted all over his hands and shoes. As he placed his sticky hand in his mouth, sucking on the purple syrup, he was surprised to find an old man staring at him from a few feet away. The man wore a funny gray sweater and a large square hat.

The man was looking at him in a very peculiar way. He looked tired and sad. Old men were supposed to be happy. They didn't have to go to 2nd grade tomorrow.

"Good morning, mister man," the boy smiled. Licking his other hand, he turned and went quickly inside.

The house stood, pinched between two houses of the same stature and style. A paperboy rode past on his bike, throwing the morning headlines at the large red door. It hit the oak and made that distinct sound that only papers make, wrapped up in their clear plastic bags. A mixture of plastic and paper blended to make a clean

THUD that carried quickly up to the second floor window. The open window, sash waving gently in the breeze, was the only evidence that someone might be home. It looked in on a comfy bedroom, well sized and snug. A large bed took up most of the space in the room. A twisted lump protruded from the smooth bedspread, looking like a medical nightmare. It was very bright, brighter than usual Tuesday mornings. A nearby siren split the air, and the lump began to stir. Groaning, it pushed a head from underneath its folds that looked up at the cracks in the ceiling. The cracks had been there for some time now, ever since the house had been moved into. It had been a long time since the lump had noticed them. They were so small and insignificant. With a quick jerk of the covers, the lump became a yawning man.

The man was very old. His skin was wrinkled and spotted, his bones sticking out in all the right places. His build was far from intimidating. His tender brown eyes looked himself up and down, checking to make sure he was still in one piece. A sigh of relief broke the silence as he thought about how fortunate he was to be alive and well.

Wife long since passed away, children married and gone, the man lived alone in the cozy two-story house he called home. He sat at the edge of the bed staring off into the spiral haze of his ancient rug. I wonder what will happen today, he thought. Back when he was young, there was always a creek to explore or a cow to be milked. Now, as his humble residence was forcefully jammed in lower class housing units, he awoke every morning to the same busy city.

Seasons change, he thought to himself.

19

Slipping into his battered leather slippers, he tugged on the bedpost and pulled himself to a stand. His fuzzy white and blue pinstripe pajamas matched his wallpaper. He stood there for a moment, camouflaged against the vertical pattern.

Getting up in the morning was not hard for the old man. He made a quick stop on the way down the hall to brush his dentures and carefully place them back inside his mouth. Trudging at a decent pace for his age, he then made his way down the sunlit hallway and ventured down the stairs. He was glad his slippers had lasted this long. They protected his feet from the itchy rug in the bathroom.

Arriving promptly at eight o'clock, he approached the ancient refrigerator that took up most of the room in his small kitchen. The old clock drummed its dismal cadence as he rubbed his eyes one more time. He was ready for breakfast.

The bright light inside the old appliance lit the white tile and blinded him for a moment, leaving small white and black dots floating around in front of his eyes. Groping carefully, he pulled the measuring cup from the fridge and poured 2 cups of water into the teapot. He realized that he had forgotten to shut the door and closed it quickly, not wanting to let any more of the cold air escape.

After setting the teapot on the stove to boil, he walked out of the kitchen and made his way to the front door. His weak arms had to wrestle with the door before it opened. The morning sun was bright and had warmed the porch floor. Taking off his slippers, he stepped out and let his cold feet thaw. The warmth reminded him of the

power of the old black stove he had taken for granted as a child.

Grabbing the paper, he walked back inside and closed the large red door. He arrived back in the kitchen just in time to greet the high pitched whistle of the teapot. Dropping the paper carelessly on the kitchen table, he poured himself a cup of hot Postum. He could hear the honks and sirens that were downtown New York.

It was a while before the large red door opened again, and this time the old man was dressed and in his walking shoes. His furry hat made him look like a funny Russian Czar. He never went anywhere without it. He made his way down the steps and out to the sidewalk, whistling an old hymn. Great is thy faithfulness... The metal gate closed behind him with a CLANG and he set off.

Soon, more and more strangers filled the sidewalks and he was lost in a flurry of cell phones and briefcases. He was on his way to the grocers. Despite the commercial noise and activity, the old man strolled as peacefully as he could. Then he turned the corner and merged onto the pedestrian highway. His pace quickened now, because he was afraid of being trampled. Sometimes it hurt his hip to walk fast, and he was afraid. He looked up and noticed the tall buildings. Things were never as loud or as big when he was a boy. He said 'good morning' to a large black man sitting on a bench, but received no answer. A tall white man bumped him hard from behind as he sped down the sidewalk, and was quickly lost in the sea of faces.

The old man continued down the sidewalk until he heard a gentle splat.

Looking down at his feet, he was surprised by a young boy, standing with his eyes closed. He had almost stepped on the child. His sticky purple hands and small brown boots were covered with a syrupy substance. Stepping up against the building, the old man wondered if he should say something. The sun was slowly cooking the city, and the he could feel little beads of sweat forming under his hat. Nothing but the steady drone of voices and footsteps.

The young boy suddenly opened his eyes- almost like he had awakened from a dream. The old man opened his mouth to speak, but the boy moved, and the words didn't come. Sucking on a sticky hand, the boy looked up at the old man as if he had been there the whole time. The young child looked at him in a very peculiar way. He looked happy, happy to see the old man.

"Good morning, mister man."

The old man blinked slowly and realized that the child had gone inside. He was alone. Again.

Lia Angell

Second Place Fiction

Waves of Change

The waves outside her window were seductive, calling for her to join them. Frothing with white foam, the sea was a glistening blue. The distant sound of the strong cycle of movement seemed to speak to her, beckoning for her to join its wild play.

Clunk! Maeve pushed her laptop computer forward on her desk and dropped her head down in its place. She groaned hollowly, then laughed at herself.

"How on earth," she muttered ruefully into the empty room, "can I concentrate on a newspaper article about Trálf's new Town Council with the constant reminder of a beautiful day outside?"

Maeve stretched a long arm behind her to rest lightly on the back of her chair. Indecision battled within her, beneath the calm, implacable mask of her features. To go or not to go, that was the question. To succumb to temptation, or to withstand nobly....

Maeve pushed her chair back in a smooth, impatient gesture. Like a cat, she paced the room, her head and shoulders thrown back, her chin jutting out.

"Oh, let Hamlet be indecisive! It's not a life-and-death situation!" she snapped irritably into the silent room. 21

Before she had time to let herself reconsider, Maeve hurried into the next room of the rented one-bedroom cottage and changed quickly into her swimsuit. As she did, she tried, as usual, to justify her "pleasure swim," speaking sharply to her reflection in the narrow mirror,

"I mean, it's such a beautiful day! It's not as if days like these come all the time to Trálf! And this story can wait. It's not even due until next week!"

She stared defiantly at herself at this last pronouncement. A pale-complexioned woman in her mid-twenties stared back, vivid blue-gray eyes mischievous beneath their initial coldness. With a sudden smile, Maeve snatched her towel, and ran out of the cottage, down the well-kept lawn to the narrow bótharín that led to a hidden cove.

It was her cove. It always had been. She had grown up in Trálf, and had visited there when on holidays from her boarding school in Dublin. On the rare warm summer days, and even on some of the many frigid ones, she had run with abandon down the pebbled shore with Georgina, hurtling into the tremendous waves and screaming joyfully.

Georgina. Maeve realized she had come to an abrupt halt and was clutching her towel fiercely, staring grimly into the horizon where the water's navy shade met the paler blue of the sky.

"Oh, why should I waste a perfectly good day thinking about her?" Maeve muttered, tossing her accessories onto her favorite rock. She ran into the waves, thrusting her legs forward with unnecessary force, trying to rid herself of the unwelcome memories of the heart-shaped face framed by fine, wavy brown hair.

The water was cool, as it always was in this southeastern part of Ireland. Maeve laughed aloud, feeling the warm sun on her back, on her black hair and on her upturned face. She waded further out, until the water had reached her waist.

"Coo-ee! Maeve! Look at this!" Maeve turned to see Georgie standing a few feet away from her, her skinny white arms waving frantically to get her attention. When she was finally sure that she was holding her young audience captive, Georgie sprang downward into the water. A few seconds later, her thin, pale legs emerged. Breaking the smooth surface of the water, they stretched stiffly upward for a moment before a tremendous wave ruined her pose.

"Caw! Caw!" A seagull screeched above her, and Maeve blinked in astonishment as she realized that she was alone in the enormous length and breath of the ocean, the gray-yellow pebbles of the shore glistening in the distance.

22 Maeve shuddered, feeling chilled as a cold blast of wind drifted toward her. She shook her head defiantly, then crouched low in the water as a tremendously strong wave approached her. The water crashed over her body, dragging her downward, filling her eyes, her nose, and her mouth, causing a great roaring in her ears. Maeve felt completely helpless, a feeling she relished. She reveled in the extraordinary power of the waves. The enormous wall of water lifted her high, then smashed her down fiercely, dragging her backward again in its seductive undertow.

She laughed.

"Miss O' Flaherty! And would you care to explain to the rest of us what is so tremendously amusing?" The head Sister halted the single file of gray-clad girls and addressed her youngest student.

Maeve hastily erased all traces of glee from her face, schooling her features into their customary Reserved-For-The-Sisters stoic blandness.

"I...I'm sure it was of no consequence, Sister," Maeve stammered, inwardly smirking at her grasp of a new word. Sister Mercy did not possess a large vocabulary, and was considerably nonplussed when presented with unfamiliar terms.

"Of 'no consequence,' eh?" Sister Mercy repeated sarcastically. "I am certain not. Let it remain so. Of no consequence, indeed!" She swept majestically back up to the front of the line, as Maeve and Georgie exchanged secret smiles.

They did everything together and were the best of friends. Georgie was always the more mischievous of the two, flaunting the danger of speaking back to the Sisters, and constantly escaping from the worst situations. Curiously, she was never caught, in contrast to Maeve, whose irrepressible silvery giggle made her very conspicuous.

Maeve had been blamed for the singed bedclothes when the two girls had attempted to read with a candle after "lights out." Georgie had been little help in that situation, her elfin face serene and innocent when the patrolling Sister had discovered

the incident. Following that had been the experience with the "flying" chamber pot....

Maeve opened her eyes in shock as she realized she had been daydreaming again, drifting back into the past that now seemed so sweet, so innocent.

She dipped her head quickly into the water, hoping to forget, willing the action to help her to learn how to forget. But the memories refused to leave, memories she had ignored for years as she had struggled through university studies at Trinity College in Dublin, and then her fighting her way back to her town of Trálf, where she now worked for the local newspaper.

She remembered the bond between herself and Georgie, that had included sharing everything, including scones loaded with jam and cream at the local coffee shops, secrets, and mutual friends.

Furious at her inability to forget the past, Maeve brought her foot down angrily, only to jerk it back with a sharp cry of pain as it met the jagged edge of a hidden rock. By now enraged at herself and the petty things that were ruining her day, Maeve struck out fiercely, swimming with strong strokes, seeking the familiar mighty comfort of the waves to ease her pain.

Thrusting her head blindly again and again out of the salty water, Maeve kept her sight fixed on the tremendous rock many metres from the shore that she had always planned to reach, though she had not yet been successful in doing so.

Maeve felt a strange exultation in the cold, uncaring depths of the ocean, in their harsh unconcern as they tossed her carelessly about. She rejoiced as she became accustomed to the ocean's rough rhythm. She forgot about time, and all other priorities, stubbornly pleased with her ability to block out all other thoughts. She was so self-absorbed that it took her a moment to realize that someone was calling her name. Stunned, she turned in the waves, then gasped in shock, uncaring of the bitter water that splashed into her mouth.

A young woman stood at the edge of the strand, waving her arms wildly. Although Maeve was too far away to discern her features, she knew that the eyes were a deep green and that the wavy brown hair framed an all-too-familiar heart-shaped face.

"Maeve! Come in! It's getting dangerous out there!" she yelled above the crash of the waves.

For a moment, Maeve only stared at her, shocked to remember that Georgie was no longer a skinny little freckled-face girl. Then her eyes narrowed to slits, and she tossed her sleekly wet hair, turning purposefully back to face the black rock still far in the distance.

Anger forced her on. Anger directed her swimming, almost blinding her as she thrust her arms through the resisting water.

How dare Georgie come to speak to her, after all she had done to lose Maeve's friendship? With the stubborn determination of a bitter old man frantically trying to recall the source of his 50-year-old quarrel with his neighbor, Maeve attempted to remember the beginning of her antagonism with Georgie.

With a red blur of resentment, Maeve recalled the day at Trinity when Georgie, in a fit of saucy restlessness, had spread wildly exaggerated stories of Maeve's past around the campus. She had done it, as she had urgently tried to explain to an incensed Maeve later, "for a laugh." But Maeve refused to be amused. The stories had circulated, each more wild than the original version. Maeve, constantly self-deprecating and slightly paranoid, was sure the entire school was in contempt of her.

She had avoided the jolly groups of boys, certain that they were laughing at her behind their jovial greetings. She had averted her eyes from the carefree young female college students, assuring herself that she was their constant source of glee. Tortured by her view of herself as a ridiculous, embarrassing young woman, Maeve had become increasingly withdrawn. Never heavy, she had lost a great deal of weight, making her wide blue-gray eyes even more startling. And she blamed it all on Georgie.

The water was suddenly frigid. Raising her head for one last ragged breath of air, Maeve finally opened her eyes, panting heavily. And then she gasped, filled with horror. The sun had gone. Maeve, twisting her head about in a frantic attempt to locate its golden gleams, realized it had disappeared behind the clouds

24 "Clouds!" Maeve spat into the water incredulously. Where had they come from? The water was still a deep blue-green, but was beginning to turn the shade of lead with the blackening sky. The waves had become rough, rising in tremendous walls around her and forcing her to be a part of their violent rhythm. Maeve fought down an emotional wave of panic as she realized that she was no longer fully in control. The sea, so friendly and seductive a little earlier, had become malevolent and increasingly dangerous.

Maeve turned sharply in the water, with one goal now lodged firmly in her brain: to reach the shore. The water was so rough that it was difficult to see the beach, but Maeve thrust all fears aside as she raised her tired arms in firm strokes, willing the waves to carry her a little closer inward. Her limbs were beginning to feel like weights, a result of her earlier wild swimming. She fought to conserve energy, but was increasingly weary. Wave after wave scooped her up ruthlessly, lifting her high before flinging her against the surface of the water and dunking her beneath its terrifying depths. Her nostrils filled with the bitter water, causing her nose to burn painfully, while its saltiness seared her bruised and scratched flesh. Once beneath the surface, Maeve was whirled around in a violent spiral, before the force of the waves thrust her out into the cold air again.

The cycle repeated itself again and again, and Maeve realized, through a haze of weariness, that she was making no progress in her attempt to reach the shore. Her entire store of energy was now expended merely in preventing herself from drifting farther out. She closed her eyes in surrender, her head bobbing tiredly, her limbs limp in the icy water. The roar of the ocean filled her ears, literally drowning out all other sounds. Maeve was conscious of an odd feeling of happiness, of peace and calm that she knew was deceptive in her tired state of mind.

Suddenly, a crash echoed around her. Maeve opened her eyes, feeling how

much energy it took now to complete even that little task. Somehow, it did not seem odd to see Georgie beside her, her wet hair plastered to her head, an expression of panic on her face. Vaguely, Maeve wondered what was wrong before she realized that Georgie was shouting at her, her arm encircling her waist.

"Maeve, you've got to help me a bit! I'm not strong enough to bring you in by myself!

Maeve let Georgie seize her arms and begin to drag her frantically toward shore. Georgie's strokes were strong and sure, but Maeve had the odd feeling that she was yelling at her. With an effort, she forced herself to listen to Georgie.

"Maeve! Please! I can't do this myself!"

Lifting her legs, which were sore and numb from the cold water and her tremendous struggles against the sea, Maeve began to kick feebly. Every muscle seemed to protest, but slowly she began to feel herself moving forward.

They developed a rhythm of their own, in defiance of the waves. Neither said a word; neither could. The waves dragged them out toward the deeper parts of the ocean; Maeve and Georgie fought their way inward. It seemed a nightmare, but finally the moment of triumph came, when Maeve felt hard, sharp pebbles beneath her feet. Georgie released her waist and arms, and they struggled silently through the rougher, smaller waves near the edge of the shore. When they stepped at last out of the frothy water, waves lapping gently at their heels, Maeve turned to Georgie.

They stared at each other without speaking, Maeve's blue-gray eyes focusing 25 solemnly on Georgie's green ones.

"What kept you?" Maeve asked simply.

"I was waiting for that tide to turn," said Georgie.

Maeve nodded. "It has."

The girls smiled in mutual understanding. There was no more to say.

Judge's Comments

Angell's story immediately establishes conflict and a tangible world for the reader; the tension here is handled very well, without melodrama. I am interested in the characters and what will happen next and am satisfied by the story's resolution.

Third Place Fiction

Everything Changing

"See you tomorrow Sparky. Bye Chester. Sleep well Lazy Leo." Jessica walked down the cold cement hallway of the animal shelter with a row of endless wire cages to her right. Anxious puppies poked their noses through the holes and wagged their stubby tails excitedly. She had finished filling the plastic water bowls, which sat in front of each dog pen, and was about to turn out the lights and head home for the night. As usual the dogs began their routine of barks and howls that echoed off the stone walls.

There was Fudge, the black lab she adored with the sleek, shiny coat and distinctive crystal blue eye. It was her dream to become a veterinarian, so she had started volunteering at the shelter to get some experience working with animals before college. After switching off the lights, she closed the kennel door with a thud, muffling the ruckus inside, and headed to her car.

26 The sizzling sound of oil on a hot skillet welcomed Jessica home from the animal shelter as she threw down her heavy backpack full of Physics and Calculus homework. It was going to be a late night for sure. Jessica's mom stood in front of the stove with steam surrounding her face from the fresh cut carrots, celery, and bell peppers that she was adding to the stir-fry. Her curly hair seemed to wrap around the strands of steam that rose up from the pan, giving her a surreal appearance. She glanced up from her work to give Jessica one of her smiles. The corners of her mouth rose up ever so slightly and her eyes closed halfway. "Welcome home sweetie."

Behind her was Jessica's twin brother, Thomas, who was busy chopping a large head of broccoli into bite-sized pieces for the meal. He was the future gourmet chef of the family in Jessica's opinion. Tall and lanky, he stood hunched over the cutting board chewing his bottom lip, a habit he'd had since he was little, and held a chef's knife in his right hand. The two of them looked nothing alike. She was short and petite with light brown hair that was always pulled back and braided, while he towered over her with his blond curls and a dazzling white smile.

"Chicken stir-fry, huh Mom?" Jessica raised her slender eyebrows.

"Yea, your brother's been wanting to make that new stir-fry sauce he's been talking about, so I thought we'd have it tonight." She tossed in some of the broccoli, turning the meal into a rainbow of colors.

"Hey family!" Jessica's dad bounced into the kitchen from the back door, his usual gregarious self. "I've been looking forward to supper all day." He leaned his head over the skillet, breathing in the smell of teriyaki and spices. Typically decked out in his fifties style collared shirt from the diner he worked at, her father was a large man

with a strong, muscular frame and stood about six feet tall. He leaned over and gave his wife a kiss on the cheek as she finished preparing the rice.

Towards the end of dinner, Jessica had taken the last bite of her meal and was about to leave, homework was calling her, when her dad switched to his "serious" voice that she and Thomas always gave him a hard time about. "Well, guys your Mom and I talked to your step aunt yesterday, and if plans work out Amber is going to come live with us next week."

Jessica kicked her brother gently under the table. He looked over at her and rolled his eyes. This wasn't a surprise for them; their parents had been talking about it for the past few months. Amber was an extended cousin whom she had met only twice, although her parents had talked about her a lot. Drugs, abusive father, drinking, parents divorced, kicked out of high school-the list was endless.

It was in November that her mom's stepsister had called to get help, and as usual Jessica's mom couldn't stand by and do nothing, even though they weren't particularly close. "Of course, Janet, George and I think she needs a fresh start, a second chance, and Sturgeon Bay is just the place." She had had that concerned look on her face with the pleading eyes, wrinkled forehead, and pursed lips while sitting at the kitchen table with the phone glued to her ear. "Sure, Sturgeon Bay would be quite a difference from New York," Jessica had thought.

Now it was actually going to happen. Jessica let out a groan to make sure her parents knew how she felt. "Really Jessica, she's family. It's the least we could do. You know Janet is at her wits end. I think being part of a family and living in a safe town will really change her." She slid her chair back and cleared her dishes from the table. At least she's my age and not some twelve-year-old girl I'd have to share a room with. I guess it could be kind of fun having a "sister" for the first time.

27

Three days later, the rumble of the garage door woke Jessica from her Saturday afternoon nap, and she heard the usual sound of car doors slamming and random voices. Amber was here. The door opened and in walked a seventeen-year-old nightmare, in Jessica's opinion. This was not the Amber she remembered. Her hair, once blond, had been dyed dark brown with a few chunks of cranberry red highlights. She seemed nervous as her green eyes darted around the house taking in her new surroundings. Jessica could just imagine the reactions her friends at school would have when this girl from the East coast entered Southview High School. The dark make-up and tattoo across her upper arm were sure to draw attention.

"You remember Jessica don't you Amber?" Her dad was trying to break the ice.

"Yea, Christmas about five years ago wasn't it?" Jessica nodded her head and gave Amber a hesitant smile. What happened to her? She looks like a freak.

Monday evening, Jessica was sprawled on her jean comforter with a Chemistry book open, calculator turned on, and lines of concentration on her forehead. School had always come easy to her in the past, but Chemistry was definitely giving her a run for her money. And with vet school in the future, she knew this

wouldn't be the last Chemistry class she would have to take. "Magnesium just doesn't balance out!" She wanted to scream, but was distracted by Amber who had just entered the room.

The smell of smoke drifted in through the door like a toxic perfume, and Jessica couldn't help but react to the stench. It wasn't just cigarette smoke either. "Ugh, you're really stinking up the room Amber. Can't you see that I'm trying to study?" She knew what her parents had told Amber; she couldn't smoke in the house. But they hadn't realized how terrible the smell could be when she came in, especially for Jessica. She was the one sharing a room with her.

"Dude, I live here too, you know." Amber shot a piercing glare at Jessica. So far their relationship was tolerable, but Jessica could sense within the past few days the tension rising. Sure it would be hard to move in with relatives you barely knew, but Jessica had little sympathy for Amber who had screwed up her life by her own choice.

One Saturday night, Jessica had invited her boyfriend over to watch a movie, Meet the Parents, which was their favorite. They had headed down to the basement for some more privacy and were curled up on a worn out sofa in the den with its dark green carpet and burgundy walls. Jessica had a bowl of piping, hot popcorn in front of her that she and Jason had been fighting over like kids. Jason, the show-off that he was, threw a piece in the air, which landed directly in his mouth. Jessica laughed and playfully gave him a shove in the side with her elbow.

28

The next thing they knew, there was Amber making herself comfortable at the end of the couch. Thomas always knew to leave her alone when Jason was over, even though the two of them were friends. Couldn't Amber have thought twice?

"Uh, Amber, do you mind?"

"What? You're just watching a movie, and your parents told me to come join you...Or else sit at the kitchen table with them while they go over finances for your dad's restaurant."

"Well, I'm sure you could learn something from that, so could you please leave?" Jessica could tell that Amber was kind of shocked by her sarcasm and cold words-it wasn't like Jessica at all. She stood up with a look of disgust and left the room in silence.

"Jeeze Jess, you didn't have to be so rough," Jason said.

"You don't understand Jason. Last night, she didn't get home until two in the morning...who knows what she was doing. She's so messed up."

Later that week, Jessica trudged into her fourth period Chemistry class, a claustrophobic room that smelled like rotten eggs and formaldehyde. She had never hated a class so much in her entire life. By the stack of papers on her teacher's desk, she could tell that they would be getting their tests back today. Fear gripped her stomach and tied it in knots. She knew the red letter at the top of her test wouldn't be the typical "A" that she was used to getting. Please be no lower than a B.

The bell rang, and her teacher picked up the stack of tests and stood in front of the class of noisy teenagers. "Well, I was fairly pleased with the results from this test,

but a few of you I noticed don't have a very good grasp of the material. For those who received a C or lower, I have assigned a tutor. You'll be meeting with him or her twice a week until the next test, and I'm hoping we'll see some improvements," Mr. Nyers said as he began passing the tests out to Jessica's row.

There it was in big, fat red marker "C-." "Oh no." Jessica could feel the tears begin to swell in the corners of her eyes. It can't get any worse...a "C-." Graduation this spring. My scholarship. No more vet school. My life is over. She closed her eyes and let out a pitiful sigh before looking through the rest of her test. At the top right corner was a note that read, "I've assigned Amber Miller to be your tutor." Amber Miller? The Amber Miller living in my house, the delinquent, the loser? She couldn't believe what she was reading, but it was plain as day written on her paper.

"Uh, Mr. Nyers, this Amber Miller isn't the girl who just transferred from New York is it?"

"Yes it is. I'm really impressed with that young lady. She's extremely proficient in Chemistry and received a five on the AP test last year, the best score you can get. I think she'll be a lot of help to you Jessica. You have the same study hall, so I've arranged for you to meet in the library on Tuesdays and Thursdays starting next week."

"Great," Jessica said under her breath. She couldn't believe it. Amber tutoring her? She had been avoiding her as much as possible during the past few days, and though they lived in the same room, they had closed each other off completely. Now Jessica was being forced to spend time with her and even worse to get "help" from this girl whom she despised. Jessica stormed out of the classroom in a rage bumping into a protruding backpack just outside the door.

29

"Excuse me." Jessica glanced over her shoulder to see who had blocked her way, and to her dismay and fury it happened to be Amber.

"Excuse you," Amber said. "Mr. Nyers told me that I'll be tutoring you on Tuesday next week, huh?" Jessica could sense the arrogance in her voice, and stormed off cursing under her breath.

The dreaded day and hour came when Jessica was to meet with Amber. She had arrived early to the spacious library with tall windows that overlooked the lake. This place had always been a haven for her with its high ceiling and tall, white walls, but today was different. She picked a large oak table towards the back of the room, to avoid any awkward stares that people might give her with Amber. It was tucked between two rows of books, virtually hidden from sight. Maybe she won't be able to find me, and I'll get out of tutoring... at least for today. She sat down and waited.

"Hey. Thought we needed some privacy, huh?" Amber set her worn out book bag on the top of the table and pulled up a chair next to Jessica.

"You're obviously more serious about this than I am," Jessica said.

"Hey, you're the one who should be serious about this. I'm not going to waste my time on some preppy girl who's going to give me grief."

"Preppy girl?"

"That's what you're acting like." Jessica rolled her eyes and wished she could be anywhere but there.

"Look, can you help me or not. I can't afford to let this class lower my G.P.A. I'm an honor student and hoping to get into vet school next year. It's been my dream since I was little, and I'm not going to let some Chemistry class change it." A librarian walked by pressing her finger to her lips. She hadn't realized they were talking so loud.

Amber lowered her voice. "First of all, Jessica, you're going to have to lose the attitude and listen to me, as hard as that might be for you. I know you think the only thing I know how to do is roll a joint or down a few beers, but I actually enjoy Chemistry. It's the reason why I finally agreed to come to Sturgeon Bay in the first place. If I graduate from high school this year, I have a chance of getting a full ride chemistry scholarship to a state school in New York. I actually have a chance to do something with my life...at least more than my parents."

Jessica was taken aback by Amber's words. No, she was shocked. This girl was smarter than she had thought; okay, way smarter. A full ride scholarship! Despite a strong desire to put Amber off, something told Jessica to give her a chance. It wasn't that she was trying to be nice to Amber anyway; her academic reputation and future were at stake here. Settle for a "C" in the class or possibly get an "A?" She didn't even have to answer her own question.

30

"Do you know how to balance equations?" Jessica asked as she pulled out her Chemistry homework for that day. It was a stupid question, but what else could she say? Pulling out a pencil from the messy bun on top of her head, Amber leaned over her shoulder to check it out.

"This is an acid base equilibrium equation."

"A what?"

"Okay, you see this compound with the OH attached to it? That's a base." Amber began explaining the differences between acids and bases while Jessica listened half-heartedly at first. For some reason it seemed so much clearer when Amber explained it compared to her teacher. He went so fast, and well, his monotone voice could make her fall asleep.

She was amazed at how well Amber knew this Chemistry stuff. Jessica looked up from the paper they were working on and stared at Amber. Her face had lost the tough edge that she was so used to seeing. Amber's eyes were wide with interest, and she frequently glanced at Jessica to make sure she understood. She must really like this. Soon the worksheet was almost finished, and Jessica had done almost half the problems on her own. It made her feel pretty good.

Out of the silence the bell rang, and Amber began gathering her calculator, pencils, and books, shoving them into her book bag.

"If you have any more problems with the last two questions, I can possibly help you with them tonight after dinner."

"Oh no. I have to work late at the animal shelter tonight....But...hey

thanks." Jessica felt kind of awkward. She owed Amber big time for helping her out today, but she quickly took off for English before Amber could say anything more.

The next week in Chemistry class, Mr. Nyers approached Jessica who was clad in a large, black apron and plastic goggles during their lab that day. Test tubes covered her workspace, and she was struggling to light her Bunsen burner to no avail.

"Jessica, I wanted to tell you that I'm very pleased with the progress you've made within the past week. Your scores have gotten much better on homework, and I think we're definitely going to see an improvement next week on the exam."

Poof! Jessica's burner lit up into a blue flame as she adjusted her beaker directly above it. "Oh thanks. The stuff is starting to make sense to me, and I've been working really hard." Okay, and so has Amber. At first Jessica had thought Amber couldn't possibly be worth her time and effort, but now Amber was making time for her because she needed help.

After school that day, Jessica was heading over to the animal shelter, anxious to see Fudge and be slobbered with kisses. It was a country road with tall oak trees lining both sides and endless farm fields in all directions. She noticed a car that had pulled over a few yards in front of her, so she slowed down and was about to pass it. It's Amber. At first Jessica planned to continue driving and not stop, but she noticed that Amber wasn't in her car. Next to her battered Ford Escort, she was hunched over something, and Jessica could sense that things were not good. Oh no. What has she done?

"Amber!" Jessica slammed the car door shut and ran toward her. Amber turned around with a face that had been smeared with tears. Her black mascara was running in streams down her face, and she could barely speak.

"I didn't mean to." She looked up at Jessica with pleading eyes. Lying in front of her was a small beagle who'd obviously been injured. "He darted in front of my car out of nowhere, and well...I feel terrible."

"We're taking him to the shelter. Dr. Wagner should be there, and he can take care of him." Jessica picked up the helpless creature into her arms and headed quickly to her car. Amber followed behind her.

At the shelter, Jessica rushed the limp beagle into the examining room where Dr. Wagner began checking for broken bones and other injuries. "I think his back legs have been bruised, but nothing serious Jessica. I'm going to give him some pain medication, and then we can check his I.D. tag and call his owner." Jessica knew that Amber was waiting in the lobby for her. "I'll be right back Dr. Wagner."

Amber was sitting in the corner of the room, her head hanging and hands tightly clasped in her lap. She had been shredding a piece of paper, and there were pieces of it scattered around her chair. "His back legs are just bruised," she said as she placed her hand gently on Amber's shoulder and sat down beside her. Amber let out a sigh of relief and thanked her for saving the little beagle. "She really does cares about this dog," Jessica thought.

"You know, he reminded me of my old dog Muffy with the white patch on

his nose." She smiled with red-rimmed eyes. Jessica looked over at this girl with the smudged make-up, red streaked hair, and recently pierced eyebrow whom she had despised. Things had definitely changed between them.

"He's going to be fine." And she realized that the two of them were going to be just fine as well.

Judge's Comments

The strength of McGinty's story is in her characters-I was happy to spend some time with them, and I found myself rooting for them, hoping their relationship would be resolved.

Looking for August

"Hello?"

"Dad?"

Nick cleared his throat. "August?"

"Yeah, hi. Sorry, it didn't sound like you. Were you asleep?"

"Yeah." Nick ran a hand over his eyes and shook his head.

"You bum. It's 11:00."

"On a Saturday. Give me a break, I was up late working."

"Oh, yeah, I bet."

"Brat." Nick was smiling now, all grogginess gone. "What's up?"

"I just wanted to let you know I'm going to May's for a while. Thought you should know in case you tried to call or anything."

"OK, thanks for letting me know. Anything I can do to avoid the ex-ball and chain."

"Yeah."

Nick frowned. She would've normally laughed at that. "August, are you all right?"

"Yeah, I'm OK, just me and Mom aren't great right now."

"OK." He hesitated, waiting. She didn't say anything. Nick ran his hand 33
through his hair. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Now she laughed. "No, don't worry, I won't go all girly on you."

"Well, it would be OK."

"Anything for a little Mom-bashing, huh? No, I'm OK, I just want to get out of here for a while, go do some sister bonding with May. Mom and I will straighten it out."

"OK. I'll call you at May's sometime."

"That'd be good. Bye Dad. Love you."

"Love you too."

"Dad!"

Nick whirled around as he heard his daughter's exuberant shout. She rushed toward him, half running and half walking as she wove through the crowd at the terminal. Finally, she reached him and flung her arms around his neck. When she pulled back, her face was glowing.

"What are you doing here?"

"Your mom told me you had a layover in Chicago. I thought I'd come hang out with you until your flight leaves."

Her smile got even bigger. She had such a beautiful smile, the kind that started in her eyes and grew to take over her entire face. "I'm glad you came, I haven't seen you in such a long time."

Nick's smile faded. "Yeah, it's been a while. Work and stuff. I'm sorry about that."

August laughed. "That's all right, I'm seeing you now. Besides, I've been busy."

"So I hear. How's school?"

"It's good, I like it there. I have good friends."

"Your mother said there's a boy."

With an exaggerated sigh, August answered, "Yes, his name's Michael, he's very nice." She arched an eyebrow and added "You'd approve."

"If you say so." Nick paused as they sat down at the airport Starbucks. He glanced behind him as he scooted his chair in and saw a young man carrying his three or four-year-old daughter on his shoulders through the terminal. She was beautiful, with brown curls and big eyes, and she squealed as she bounced on his shoulders, making her father laugh, which bounced her even more. Nick turned back and saw August watching them too. They both smiled, then quickly broke eye contact.

August stood up. "I'm getting a Frappuccino. Do you want anything?"

"Yeah, just a regular coffee. Wait, here." Nick pulled ten dollars from his pocket and handed it to her.

She grinned. "Man, I should meet up with you more often."

Nick checked messages on his cell phone until August returned with the coffee. She carefully scooped whipped cream into her mouth from the end of her straw while Nick put sugar in his coffee.

34 Nick took a sip, then cleared his throat. "August, why didn't you tell me you were going to Hawaii?"

August blinked in surprise. "My roommate's family was going. They asked if I wanted to go with them."

"But why didn't I know about it. Or your mother, she said you didn't call her until after you'd been there for three days."

"I don't know, I haven't talked to you in a couple months, it only came up a week before Spring Break. And I don't think Mom was even home, I think she was gone with what's his name. Was she upset? She didn't sound upset when I talked to her."

"I would've thought you would at least call someone if you were leaving the country."

"Hawaii's in the country."

"August Marie..."

"Sorry." She was silent for a minute, curling and uncurling a straw wrapper around her finger, then said slowly, "I don't know why I didn't call you. I guess it just didn't occur to me. I just decided to go. I'm sorry, Dad, I didn't know you'd be upset. You never have been before."

Nick got home from work at 8:00 Monday evening. He tossed his keys and jacket on the kitchen table, set his briefcase on the floor, and got a Coke from the fridge. He leaned against the counter, alternately taking drinks from the can and rolling his stiff neck. His eyes came to rest on the refrigerator door. He studied August's senior picture for a moment, then set the can down and picked up the phone.

As it started to ring, he glanced at his watch. 9:00 in Detroit, hopefully the boys weren't in bed.

"Hello?"

"May? This is Nick."

There was a pause. "Hey, Nick, how are you?"

"Doing all right. I didn't wake the boys, did I?"

She laughed. "Not likely. I swear they don't need sleep at all, they just run 24 hours straight."

Nick grinned. "Yeah, well, I don't think you can complain. They got it from you. I used to stay up all night reading your books and watching videos to try and get you to sleep. It never worked once."

Her voice got quiet. "Yeah."

Nick cleared his throat. "So, is August there?"

"She is, but she's in bed."

"Huh. That's early."

"Yeah." Another pause. "I'm not sure she's doing too well, to tell you the truth."

Nick stood up from his slouched position and began to walk slowly around the kitchen. "Why? What's wrong?"

"Well, she's not getting along with Mom. She's pretty busy with her new husband and all. I think things are pretty tense there. And August and Michael sort of broke up." 35

"She didn't tell me that."

"Doesn't surprise me."

"Ouch." He stopped walking.

"Well, not too many 20-year olds discuss their boyfriends with their fathers, do they? Besides, you know August. She doesn't like to bother anyone. Which is why I feel so bad about..." her voice trailed off.

"What's up, May?"

"Nothing, I just...maybe I should...well, we've just got a lot going on with the boys right now. It's great that she's here, wonderful, but I don't have the time to spend with her that she needs right now. And we're supposed to leave for Florida in a week. I was thinking about just sending Drew with the boys and staying with her, but my dad's supposed to come too...I don't know. She keeps telling me it's fine, that she can take care of herself. I don't know."

He started moving again, circling the kitchen table. "Where is she going after you leave?"

"Back to school. She has friends in summer school that she can stay with. I know she'll be OK, I just feel like we're all abandoning her."

"Come on, May, that's not true."

"Yeah, but still..." She seemed to be waiting for something. Finally, she asked "Nick, what are you doing next week?"

He leaned back on the counter. "I'm supposed to leave for New York on Monday. I'll be there two weeks."

"Oh. Well, that's fine, I figured you had work stuff. She'll have fun in California. I'm sure it'll all turn out to be no big deal."

"Yeah."

"Well, I'll have her call you tomorrow."

"OK, thanks May."

"Sure. Bye Nick."

"Bye." Nick rubbed the back of his neck. It didn't seem to be loosening at all. August was probably fine. She'd never been very close with her mother anyway. That thing with Michael though...they'd been pretty serious. She could've told him about that. Not that he'd have know what to tell her. Nick drank from his Coke again, then held the can against his chin. She'd sounded fine on the phone, happy, as always. May tended to blow things out of proportion. And he suspected she didn't mind putting guilt on him every now and then. He chugged down the rest of the Coke, then set the empty can on the counter. He'd call August tomorrow. That decided, he picked up his briefcase and went into the living room to work.

"August? Hmm, where can August be?"

36 *Nick heard giggling coming from afghan-covered lump on the couch. "Oh no, August came to visit me and I lost her. I can't find her anywhere."*

The lump on the couch wiggled and the laughter got louder. Nick sighed loudly. "I'm exhausted, and I just can't seem to find August. I'm going to sit down on the couch and take a rest."

Nick eased himself down onto the lump on the couch, careful to keep most of his weight on his feet. August squealed. "What in the world?" Nick exclaimed, jumping up and pulling off the blanket. August popped up, delighted. "August! There you are, I couldn't find you anywhere."

She beamed up at him, showing off the gap between her baby teeth. Nick picked her up and brushed the curls out of her eyes, then hugged her tightly. This was the first time she had visited since he and Robin had split up a year before, and he'd had no idea how much he'd missed her until she showed up at the front door with her tiny red "Going to Grandma's" suitcase and that amazing smile. In the hour since she'd arrived, they'd already played this, her favorite game, seven times. He'd hoped she'd take a nap soon after arriving so he could get started on the huge stack of work on his desk, the result of the extra hours he'd taken on in the past year, but now hoped she'd stay awake.

August pulled back from the hug and with an almost squealing giggle she dove back on to the couch, scrambling to pull the blanket over her tiny body. From underneath, Nick heard a muffled "You can't find me, Daddy."

"Hey Dad."

"August, hi. May told you I called?" Nick leaned forward, resting his elbows

on his mahogany desk.

"Yeah, sorry I missed you last night."

"That's OK." Nick saw the Line 2 light begin flashing on his phone. "I didn't know you and Michael broke up."

"Oh, yeah. We did." He waited for her to say more, but the line was silent.

"Honey, are you all right?"

"I'm fine. I mean, it sucks, but I'm OK."

"August, are you sure? May sounds really worried."

"May always sounds worried." He couldn't tell, but thought she sounded like she was smiling. He pushed back from the desk and leaned back in his chair.

"Well, if you're sure you're all right."

"Yeah." She cleared her throat. Nick frowned. "It's fine. I'm a grown up, Dad, I can handle this stuff."

"OK. You know if I didn't have the trip..."

"Yeah."

His frown deepened. "All right, well, I'll call again in a few days."

"OK. Love you."

"Love you too. Bye honey."

"Bye." Nick held the phone to his ear after he heard the click of August hanging up. He stared at the dark wood of his desk, drumming his fingers against it. The Line 2 button on his phone was flashing again. After a moment he sighed and hit it.

37

Nick sat drumming his fingers on the dark wood of the kitchen table. Every now and then he heard slamming drawers through the ceiling. Robin seemed to enjoy reminding him that she was packing to leave. He blew out a breath and ran his fingers through his hair, then rubbed his neck to try and work out the knot that seemed to always be there lately. He heard Robin's footsteps coming down the stairs, bringing another box or suitcase to the car. Nick stood up quickly and walked in to the living room to avoid meeting up with his soon to be ex-wife as she passed through the kitchen to the garage.

He entered the room and sat down on the couch, prompting the two small girls on the floor to turn around. August smiled, then quickly turned back to the cartoons on TV. Four year old May studied him longer, her forehead furrowed over her blue-gray eyes. Nick smiled, and May smiled back, but her eyes stayed serious. Finally, she turned back to the TV.

Nick studied the girls for a moment. Even from the back, they looked nothing alike. May was so thin, willowy really, and so tall for her age, with straight strawberry blond hair. And August was all curls and rolls. The faces that were turned from him at the moment looked just as different, both reflecting the features of their respective fathers. Robin had looked hurt the one time he'd mentioned, offhand, that neither of her daughters were anything like her. He'd meant physically, but hadn't done anything to clear up the misunderstanding.

He saw May start pulling on the ends of her hair. "May?" he asked gently. She turned

slowly to face him, and he saw that, as he'd suspected, her eyes were welling up. She got up quietly and climbed on to Nick's lap. He hugged her tightly as her tears started to spill down her cheeks. August looked at them for a second, and then her baby face crumpled and she started to sob. Nick chuckled in spite of himself, then sighed. "Come here, babe."

Robin walked in a moment later to find Nick on the couch with both of her daughters crying in his lap. She shook her head. "What did you do?"

Nick ignored her. Robin glanced at her watch and then at him, but quickly moved her gaze around the room. "I have everything packed up." She waited for him to respond, but when he didn't her tone hardened. "May, go and put your coat on."

May slid from Nick's lap and walked out of the room. She was still crying without a sound. August calmed down quickly once her sister left the room. Nick leaned his face against her head, warm from crying, and jerking occasionally with a hiccup. Robin watched for a minute, her gaze seeming to rest on some point through them, then walked quickly to the couch and picked August up. Nick let go easily, and was immediately sorry. Robin turned without a word and walked into the kitchen. Nick closed his eyes for two breaths, then followed.

Robin had August sitting on the table while zipping her into her lavender winter coat. August was uncharacteristically quiet, her green eyes moving back and forth between her parents. Nick waited until she was bundled up, then picked her up, moving Robin aside with his body, and carried her into the garage. May was already in the car, staring out the window at the blank concrete wall. He set August in her car seat and struggled to fasten the straps around her heavily padded body. He glanced up at May. She was watching him from the corner of her eye. "May, I was thinking, maybe you can come see me too when August comes to visit." She shrugged, and her eyes went back to the wall.

"She has her own father to visit." Robin came into the garage behind him and walked around to the driver's side. She got in, tossing her purse into the passenger seat, and started the engine.

Nick's heart rate quickened. "I'll call about setting up a time for her to come here."

"All right."

"And call when you get there."

Robin glanced back, her eyes narrowing. "OK, sure."

"And..." There was nothing else. "May? I'll see you soon, hon." She leaned her head against the window. Nick looked down at August. She was staring at the frayed end of her hood tie, her eyes nearly crossing, and then her gaze relaxed as she put the end into her mouth and looked up at him. Nick smiled and hooked his finger around the string, pulling it gently from between her tiny teeth. August laughed. Nick kissed her forehead, his throat tightening. "I'll see you soon," he whispered. "I love you."

"Love you Daddy." Nick cleared his throat once, then again, before kissing her again and quickly closing the car door. Robin immediately started to back down the driveway. As she pulled into the street, Nick had a moment to see August waving out the side window before the car pulled away. He stood in the garage for several minutes, looking at the tree behind where her window had been, then turned and went into the house, slapping the button to lower the garage door.

When Nick walked in through the garage on Tuesday evening, the phone was ringing. He dropped his briefcase and keys on the floor and grabbed it.

"Hello?"

"Oh, hey, Dad. I thought it was going to go to the machine."

"Nope, caught it just in time. What's up?"

"Um..." her voice sounded strange, sort of tight. "Well I called Mom today."

Nick pulled out a chair from the table and sat down. "OK..." She didn't say anything. "How did that go?"

"All right, I mean, we didn't fight or anything, but...I don't know, she just didn't really seem to have time to talk."

"Well, what with husband #3 and all, she's got to be pretty tied up."

"Yeah."

Nick winced. "Honey, I'm sure she wants to talk to you."

"I guess."

He cleared his throat. "Well, what does May say."

"Nothing, she's not here. She's out getting trip stuff for the boys. They're leaving in a couple days...I don't know what to do." Her voice was sounding increasingly strained.

Nick fidgeted in his chair. He hadn't heard her cry since, well, since she was young enough that he knew what to do about it. "Well, hey, you could always hitch a ride with them to Disney World."

There was a pause, then her voice exploded in his ear. "Would it actually kill you to be parental for, like, two seconds?"

Nick blinked rapidly. August spoke again quickly. "I'm sorry, Dad, I didn't mean that. I just had a bad day, it's fine..."

"August, August," Nick finally broke in. Once she was quiet, he spoke again, slowly. "It's OK. Sorry, I guess I wasn't being...I'm not..." He wasn't sure how to finish the sentence.

"But it's OK."

Nick's brow furrowed. "Not really."

He heard August clear her throat, and half chuckled realizing he'd been about to do the same thing. "Hey, listen, why don't you drive up here?"

"What?"

"I think it'd be good if you came here for a while."

"But...I thought you had a trip."

"I do, yeah, but maybe I could cut it short. Or you could come with me."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Definitely. I'd love it if you came along. Plus, come on, you've never even seen New York."

"Uh, yeah, I went senior year with Mom. Did I not tell you about that?" Nick groaned. "But I've never been with you," she added quickly. Her voice got quieter. "Thanks, Dad."

"No problem. I should've done it before."

After a few seconds, August broke the silence. "Hey, maybe I could get discovered for Broadway."

Nick smiled and leaned back in his chair. "Absolutely."

Coincidence

Robert's ears kept popping as the plane steadily rose into the gray, dreary sky over Atlanta, Georgia. He peered out the small, double-paned window as the scene below him disappeared beneath a cloud. Sighing heavily, he loosened his seatbelt in order to give his weary body a little moving room. As Robert fidgeted in his seat trying to find that one position of comfort, he was overwhelmed by the noise pollution. The combination of the engine noise, cries of babies, and the idle chatter of strangers were too much for his already high blood pressure. In fact, as he looked around the plane, he got this strange sensation, some may describe as panic, which kept drawing his eyes to the emergency exit a few rows up. Not that he was a man who battled with suicidal thoughts, but staying trapped on this plane with these people made plunging to his death not seem so bad.

In the midst of the coach class, Robert was seen as a rarity among the masses. In fact, when he walked onto the plane decked out in his black, designer suit with matching briefcase and a cell phone in one hand, you would have thought the President had arrived. The stares, which would normally boost his already high self-esteem, today only furthered to annoy him. The business trip that Edward Jones had sent him on was the third this month, and, like usual, was neither informative nor motivating. As the top seller of his division in Chicago, Robert was obligated to teach a small seminar, titled "How To Sell Stocks With Success," which tied him to attending several extra company meetings in a ploy to help Edward Jones increase in annual earnings.

41

Feeling restless, Robert decided to busy his hands with a little scheduling. As he reached into his suit pocket to retrieve his palm pilot, he was interrupted as the large, stiff chair banged against his knees, causing his tray table to fall down. Robert pushed his tray upward, locking it into place, while he shifted his legs to the left, bumping the older woman's leg next to him.

"Sorry," he said, not bothering to make eye contact.

"Oh don't worry about it," the woman said, moving awkwardly toward the left part of her seat.

"Excuse me, ma'am," said an extremely obese man across the aisle from Robert, "I was wondering if we are going to be served a meal on this flight?"

As the brave flight attendant informed the man that no meal would be served, you could almost feel the tension rising in the air. The man, feeling the need to share his concerns, began to inform the stewardess about the importance of food to him, as if one had to question the man's loyalty. His wife's cheeks were a lovely shade of scarlet, as she pleaded with him to calm down. Disgusted, Robert reached into his suit pocket in search of his palm pilot, when his tray table dropped suddenly onto him from the thrust of the child in front.

"Suzie, you need to sit still," the young mother said, in the other seat in front of Robert. The lady appeared to be not a day over twenty-one, yet the bags under her eyes gave her the appearance of a woman well beyond her years. Framing her face were strands of auburn hair that had made a daring escape from the rubber band strictly confining the rest of her ponytail. Her womanly frame was hidden under an old college sweatshirt, bearing the name of Penn State, that was now home to some leftover jelly from lunch and a few strips of ketchup from the mid-day snack. Tired and frazzled, she tried desperately to keep her three-year old child from being strangled by the fellow passengers around her.

"Why?" Suzie asked with a voice strong enough for Broadway.

"Because, when you move around you move your seat and it bothers the people behind you. Just like when you kicked the chair a few moments..."

"Why?" Suzie exclaimed.

"Well..."

42 Robert sighed. It is not that he hated kids, but in closed, confined areas, children seemed a bit too much for everyone, especially their mothers. Taking the bottle of Tylenol out of his bag, he struggled with the child safety lid for a few moments before it came ajar, hooking on the rim of the bottle. With a loud sigh, Robert pushed the lid back down. After a few more failed attempts, the red lid popped off. He took three pills out and tossed them into his mouth, swallowing hard. As he sat in his small chair, he began to count backwards. Ten, nine, eight, seven.... the dialogue continued even more loudly as the young child moved her focus from kicking to playing with the buttons on her armrest much to the mother's dismay-Robert felt his blood level rising. He began counting again: Ten, nine, eight, seven, six...and as he descended to number one, he felt the tension overtaking his body ever so strongly. No change; counting never worked. Robert made a mental note to tell his therapist this new discovery on Monday.

Robert was not completely heartless to this scene. Although he had no children of his own, he did have empathy for this mother, but he had to question her intelligence. She had been giving her child the same instructions the last thirty minutes of the flight. You would think that after repeating yourself ten times, you might search for a new tactic. But no, this mother seemed to think that reasoning with a three-year old would eventually end in peace. More likely, however, it would end with the mother losing her mind. Robert thought about giving her his therapist's business card...but his therapist had too much business already and looking at the situation, he doubted that she could afford 100 dollars per hour. Instead, maybe a little free advice would be helpful. Robert leaned forward to speak, but all he could find were phrases like, "I heard the drive from Atlanta to Chicago is amazing this time of year...you SHOULD have tried it" or "If you don't spank your child, may I?" Robert quickly came to the conclusion that he needed to get out of here; maybe a quick jaunt to the bathroom would calm his rising frustration.

"Excuse me," he said, tapping the old woman's shoulder next to him.

"Oh don't worry about it," the lady next to him said, moving her legs to the side. He squeezed out.

The plane ride had only been about forty minutes so far, but Robert had concluded that the lady sitting next to him, beyond the child and obese man, was going to be the most trying. She was an odd lady, of about fifty-five or so, with little gray streaks of hair silhouetting her angelic, but sagging face. She hadn't stopped knitting since the plane took off, taking only small breaks to comment on the weather and sip her ice tea. Unfortunately for Robert, the tea triggered a long forgotten memory that she explained in much detail to him. It had something to do with the summer of 1940, when she was a little girl. Her grandmother, who lived on a small farm in Kansas, would make her very own tea and let it brew in the sun. Robert, not knowing how to respond nor relate, nodded periodically; not that the woman needed encouragement for her tale lasted a good fifteen minutes before she went back to knitting. There was something about her that seemed so familiar; maybe it was her brown, wool sweater or her floral jumper. The more he pondered her the more he was convinced that it had to be a strange cross between Martha Stewart and Mr. Rogers.

Walking slowly up the aisle, Robert's eyes began to focus on the little, bitty white lights lining the aircraft's aisle- a comforting safety feature. Robert breathed in heavily, and then exhaled quickly. There was something about the smell of airplanes that made him sick. Maybe it was the stale air or the sixty polyester, blue chairs that lined Delta's aircraft; whatever it was, it seemed to be almost unbearable this flight. Frustrated, he began to rotate the large black buttons on his suit jacket until he couldn't turn them any further and let go, repeating the process over again. Robert came to an abrupt stop. As he stood in the front of the aircraft, he unconsciously peeled back the blue curtain revealing the superb first class section-complete with a blanket and pillow on every seat. He never really appreciated the large, leather seats until this experience today. The lush legroom and personal attention bestowed upon the coveted twelve members made his heart wrench. In fact, as he stood there, he seemed to hear the "Delta paradise" call him, and moving forward he was more confident that the voice he heard was trying to tell him something, to get his attention....

"Sir...Sir...Sir, excuse me. This section is closed off to coach class."

"Oh, sorry," Robert said, as the scratchy blue curtain was flung in front of his face, brushing his nose in a most superior sway by a flight attendant of no more than twenty years. Her blond hair was pulled into a tight bun, stretching her face into a rigid, unnatural smile. Much like a Halloween costume, the attendant's blue uniform hung awkwardly on her petite frame, making a nice home for her golden Delta wings. With one raised brow, she turned quickly and made her way down the aisle in search of another passenger breaking a rule.

Robert stood there for a few moments trying to take in what had just occurred. He felt foolish like a third grader that just got caught running in the hallway. Did she not know who he was? He was Robert Fisher, the man who was supposed to be sitting in first class. The man that had spent so much time on Delta's

stupid aircraft that he was almost positive they would name one after him or least give him a certificate for most mileage acquired. And this lady, half his age, shuts the curtain leaving him with these people. When he got off this plane, he would definitely be having a little chat with the manger of this crew. Not only had he been forced to leave a day late but also the airlines had run out of first class seats leaving him with...coach, and they have the nerve to fill the plane with rude teenagers posing as flight attendants.

Robert, feeling dejected and ashamed, slowly turned around allowing his gaze to rest on his fellow passengers. Not in his whole life had he ever been in such a confined space with such... white trash. He didn't belong here. He was a man of importance. In his district, he owned half of Edward Jones; yet he was forced to sit in a cramped seat with a lady whose only words were "Oh, don't worry about it," or "I sure love airplane rides, it gives me time to knit." Like he cared. All he wanted to do was be in his section-first class- where small talk was not accepted and where businessmen were left to fiddle with their laptops and look important.

Turning toward his seat, Robert squeezed once again past the lady with the needles. As he settled himself back down, he decided to try to sleep through the remainder of this dreadful flight. Robert leaned his head back against the chair and closed his eyes tightly. Unfortunately, this left Robert with his hearing heightened, and the incessant taping of the knitting needles grew louder and louder, echoing in 44 Robert's head. Opening his eyes ever so slightly, he found the elderly women staring at him.

"Oh, your awake," she said.

"Well...actually..." he said.

"I was sitting here knitting when I saw your business label on your briefcase and realized you must work for Edward Jones, which is quite a coincidence since that company just hired my son-in-law last fall. I mean, what is the chance that I would sit next to an employee from the same business as my son-in-law?" she said, taking a short break to catch her breath.

Robert was about to say that actually there was a very good chance that she would sit next to an employee of Edward Jones since there are about one million employees in the country. Not knowing where this conversation was going, Robert instead tried desperately to think of a good conversation ender. Coming up with nothing, he sat waiting for her to begin again.

"Well, how rude of me! Here I am talking, and I never introduced myself. My name is Rose McFadden," she lifted her hand to shake Robert's. "I live outside Atlanta and am actually going to visit my daughter and son-in-law in Chicago. They have a new addition to their home!" She said pausing in her usual manner.

"Not a baby...I know that is what you were thinking. No, actually they just bought a new cat. I told them that was all right for now, but I need more than a cat to spoil. How about you, what is your name? Are you traveling for business or pleasure?" she said.

"My name is Robert Fisher, I am on business," he said, bending over to find some reading material in which to busy himself.

"Oh, of course. You are just like my son-in-law, Henry. He travels so often it is ridiculous. I get so nervous to hear him always traveling, but he seems to like it. Does your wife complain?"

"No, I am not married."

"Well, that's just fine."

Robert was overwhelmed with relief. For a moment he thought there could be something wrong with him. Rose went on to discuss how she met her husband. In fact, Rose stated, much to the chagrin of Robert, that she used to be just like him-content in being single. But then one day she met Bill, 'the man of her dreams,' and they got married only a year later. Robert did not feel any strong connection with the topic being discussed; therefore he spent the next 40 minutes drifting in and out of consciousness. As he awoke from one daydream, he was greatly amused by what he saw-Rose was telling a story about her daughter's first Halloween, with such excitement, you would have thought she was talking about winning the lottery. There was something kind of heartwarming in the way Rose talked about her family; she was definitely proud of them. Robert leaned his head back against the seat. Rose sort of reminded him of someone...a grandmother, not his own, of course, but the typical grandmother-the kind that remembered your birthday, called you just because they missed you, and of course baked you your favorite meal whenever you stopped by. As amusing as she was, Robert couldn't help himself-but when she hit on the topic of favorite meals to bring to potlucks, Robert felt his eyes starting to glaze over.

45

"Do you find that other stock brokers in your field are men of integrity?" she asked, leaning forward as if anticipating to hear the words of a great scholar.

Robert awoke from his trance unable to understand where he was or how he got there.

"Well...um...what is the question?" Robert asked.

"Oh, well, I was wondering if you found the people you work with to be good individuals? With the whole Enron scandal, it seems hard to trust those large businesses- that they are working for the good of their customers. Have you found this to be true?" she paused, looking up at him with a smile, as if trying to encourage him to share openly and honestly.

"Um...well, I think it is hard to tell what each of our employees motivations are. But as an employee of Edward Jones, it is our responsibility to help people with their finances as best we can-you know, with their best interests in mind."

"Oh, of course. I am not surprised you follow such strict guidelines for yourself, but I have found that so many don't."

With much tenderness and compassion, Rose began to share her family's tragedy with a financial advisor. Henry, her son-in-law, had been born into a very affluent family but because of the early deaths of his parents he was left with quite a large inheritance. As a young man and newly married, Henry sought guidance from a

stockbroker to handle his buying and selling of stocks, and general investment of his money.

"It was so strange, but the stockbroker felt no shame in risking Henry's money in order to get just a little more money from his cut."

As Rose paused, Robert began to fidget in his seat. He had that sick feeling in his stomach. He was sure he knew how this story would end, but was hoping desperately for a different ending. Would he actually be able to pull off acting surprised? He worked with people daily who did unethical things with people's money to get a little more from it for themselves. In fact, he knew he was one of those people. He didn't get to where he was by playing strictly by the rules. The problem was that people like Rose just didn't understand the business world. It was competitive; if you don't play the game you are out. I mean, really, who wanted a stockbroker that was too safe? They did it for the customer. Sure they took risks, but it usually ended fine. Robert loosed his tie. He checked his watch, comparing it to when the plane was scheduled to land.

"Well..." Robert said.

As Rose opened her small mouth to begin, she was interrupted by the flight attendant.

"Excuse me, what would you like to drink?"

46 After getting their drinks and small bags of peanuts, Rose stated, "Now where was I?"

"Oh, you were talking about Harry's stockbroker."

"Oh yes, Henry's stockbroker. Well, unfortunately, we learned a little too late that his stockbroker had began to do really unethical things with his money and, in fact, started losing some of it."

Rose went on to share the devastating effects the stockbroker's decisions had on her family. Having lost most of Henry's assets, there was nothing that could be done because of all the legal maneuvering that went on. Henry had been young and had not signed certain papers protecting him from things such as this and was left to deal with the consequences.

"Excuse me sir," the large man sitting across the aisle stated.

"Yes," Robert said.

"I couldn't help but notice that you don't seem to be eating your peanuts. Would you by chance be willing to part with those, partner?"

"Sure, whatever," Robert stated, feeling the irritation rising in him, "Please, continue." He was not sure why he had just said that as he didn't want to hear this...but yet, in a sick kind of way, he did.

"Well, since both Henry and Cynthia were in graduate school at the time, they had to quit. I feel so bad to this day. I wish I could have helped them pay, but Bill and I have never been really blessed in the financial area."

Rose continued on her story, talking about the great sacrifices that the four of them made for each other. Cynthia and Henry moved back into Rose's basement.

Henry, her son, with the help of his wife working two jobs, was able to go back to school where he took business courses and was able to get certified to sell stock. According to Rose, this was quite a time of celebration, but nothing compared to his finding work.

"It is so funny to see Henry so passionate about his work. He knows what it is like to have nothing, and he really appreciates having the opportunity to help people get their feet back underneath them again. I, of course have no idea about any of that business stuff, but it has been fun to see Henry all excited."

The plane bounced and shook as it hit the runway. Robert thought it was so strange they were already in Chicago. As the seatbelt sign went off, the fellow passengers scattered this way and that rushing to get off the plane. Rose just sat waiting patiently for the aisle to clear. Robert sat next to her. He almost didn't know how to leave. Robert wasn't sure what to do with what he had heard, but he had a feeling it would be awhile before he could forget it. As Rose stood to get her bag, Robert squeezed around her. He opened the overhead bin and lifted her bag down, handing it to Rose.

She took it, with a smile on her face, and said, "Well, sorry for talking your ear off. You really are a saint for listening to such an old women." Turning she marched down the aisle and Robert just stood there. He then realized he was the last off the plane, and he didn't really mind.

American Attitudes

~or~

As One Drowning

"Oh, I never knew."

"Quite honestly, neither did I."

"None the less, let us continue on in the discussion. If you had to choose life over death in the case of personal conviction, how would you stand?"

"Well," said the dark haired student in the back, "who's watching?"

"What is your conviction; I think that has a voice in who would be watching, don't you?"

"I believe that everyone should protect the environment to the fullest extent. It's all we'll ever have."

"Is it worth protecting with your life?"

"I would say so! What makes a human being worth more than that of a dolphin or a centipede or an ape? Everyone should hold the environment as their highest of priorities," the student stated, becoming more intense with every word that was spoken.

"So you would protect the environment with your life?"

"Absolutely."

"How about you?"

"Me?"

"I'm not an environmentalist."

"What would you give our life for? What is your conviction?"

"I think that children should be protected at all cost."

"You live in a foster home, do you not?"

-quietly- "Yes."

"Did you protect your brother?"

"I tried to."

"So this is more than academic for you?"

-eyes on floor- "I guess so; yeah."

"Hmmm, so what did you do to protect the whales?"

-sheepishly- "I-I-I write letters to my congressman,"

"What kind of paper do you use? Brand, that is."

"Pardon me?"

"Your paper brand? What is it?"

"Five-star..."

"Does it contain post-consumer products?"

-looking around- "I-I don't know."

"What about when you type your letters...do you use a computer?"

"Yes."

"Do you print or e-mail?"

"Print..." *-voice dropping-* "it has more effect on paper..."

"Hmm...how did you get to school today?"

"Car."

"No bus service to your neighborhood? School or public?"

"No - I mean there is, but I can't take it. Schedule and all."

"Who rides with you? I mean, since you are coming to be here with clubs

and organizations, presumably?"

"Nobody."

"How far?"

"I'm sorry?"

"No, I am. I said how far? From your home to the school."

"A mile and a half," *-as if that were an end all to the questioning, the student*

triumphantly smirked-

"Do you own a bike?"

-startled- "A what?"

"A bike-a two wheeled device that is driven by your two feet by method of a gear mechanism."

"Yes, but I haven't ridden it in years."

49

"You, did you ever get hit for your brother?"

"Yes-there were times when...it was...so horrific...he was so drunk and she wouldn't do anything...I tried...he was so much bigger...I couldn't help..."

-tears, runs from rooms-

"I see. I see that he knows the scarring. He knows the value, but you, you would die for a cause, but wouldn't walk to school or ride your bicycle a mile and a half," *-turning from stunned student -* "What about you. I know your conviction. You wear it everyday."

-Surprised-

"This? This is something my mom gave to me."

"So it means nothing to you? Why do you wear it?"

"But it means a whole lot! My mom got it from her mom when she started High School and I'm the third to get it."

"What does it mean?"

"That my mom loves me."

-blankly stares at class-

-annoyed-

"Anyone else?"

"That means something to me."

"So you finally speak! It's so good to hear your voice; I had forgotten that you were in my class at all. They call you mouse, is it?"

-snickering-

"Some call me that."

"So what does that," -pointing- "mean to you?"

"So very much."

"Would you die for that meaning?"

"Yes."

-sternly- "Tell me that meaning."

"You don't want to hear it."

-short student in corner- "I do."

-portly student in back- "So do I."

"So you see, even if I do not, they do. Let us have it, mouse. Rise above your name."

"It is life in its very simplest and purest elements. It is the sign of so much lost and gained at one time. It is the seekable mystery that has been sought and found..."

"Quite the poet you are! We never knew...so what is this mystery?"

"The key to immortality."

-laughter-

-laughter-

-stares-

"Immortality - well tell me, *Indiana*, have you yet found this elixir?"

"I have."

-through red face, glistening with laughter and sweat beads- "And do tell, what is this elixir?"

"Water - wat-"

-laughter-

"WATER!"

"Yes, water."

"Tell me about this - water."

"Water that never - that will always flow from a pure well; an oasis in the desert; this water is what I drink everyday. It is the blood of my father's son; it means that I am complete. This thing her mother gave her, my father gave me when He sent my King to die."

"Oh stop. This religious drabble has no place here."

"You asked."

-turning- "Are you talking back?"

"No, but-"

"No but's. All of you. To the front."

-silence, sulking walk of three-

"Stand here."

-embarrassment-

"You there, turn off the lights."

-darkness-
 -complete, encompassing darkness that hangs as a coat on an old hanger-
 "Do not move. Stand as I come to each of you. Do not talk and do not say anything to the herd."
 -scuffling-
 -metal on metal scrapping-
 -to first student-
 "This is a knife at your neck," -pressure grows as the sharpness of the blade; blood and sweat mix together on the student's neck- "Say you will not die for the centipede or I will kill you."
 -silence, then tears-
 -whispered-
 "I will not die for the centipede."
 -more steps-
 -whisper to second student-
 "Say you will not die for your mother."
 -blade sits on jugular. Moist skin moves the blade with every raced heart beat.
 Students fingers twitch at the feel of the blade.-
 "I will kill you if you do not say it. Have no doubt."
 -pressure-
 -screamed-
 "I will not die for my mother! I don't want to die!"
 -steps-
 -whispered-
 "You know what I'm going to say to you."
 -shaky-
 "Yes."
 -knife presses harder-
 "What will you say?"
 -hand movement. Finds knife. Pushes tighter against neck.-
 "I will die for my water; for my Jesus."
 -solid thud against floor. Gurgling sound erupts, as one drowning-
 -darkness continues to pervade the room-
 "We have two failures and one A,"
 -pulls out handkerchief, wipes blade-
 "Lights."
 -one dead on floor. Two weeping and clearly relieved.

Odette/Odile

The metal was hot under Katerina's hands. She ran her sweaty palms down her black uniform, breathing quickly and forcing herself to relax her viselike grip on the door handle. Willing herself to appear calm, she entered the room.

The large dance studio was filled with people. Or so it seemed. The dominating figures in the room were the four middle-aged dance instructors seated near the far door. They appeared larger than life as their images were reflected again and again on the mirrored walls. To Katerina's anxious eyes, they seemed ridiculously like judges, in some sort of theatrical Supreme Court. And she was the one on trial.

The three dance mistresses and Monsieur Du Bois had come to observe Katerina practice. The New York City Ballet was performing the classic *Swan Lake* this season, and now was the time to choose the lead roles.

52 A door behind her opened with a sharp click, and Katerina turned slightly as Ivan Markovsky emerged from the dressing rooms. Instantly, Katerina felt small, insignificant, and younger than her 19 years. Ivan was a superb dancer, taller than the "three inches above the ballerina" required of male dancers. He was of Russian descent, the only child of two successful dancers. He faced Katerina, raising a dark eyebrow in silent, swift appraisal, then turned as if in dismissal to commence his warm-up exercises. Katerina, her face burning a fiery red, began her own exercises at the barre.

The air in the studio seemed heavy, as if in empathy with the tense occasion. The ballet instructors spoke in low, clipped tones to each other, their sharp eyes following each movement of the young, black-clad dancers working at the bane. The overhead lights were bright, drawing out the glare of the mirrored walls. Katerina sensed rather than saw Madame Ivanovna seating herself at the piano, and placed herself in a prepared position. The suspenseful atmosphere of the room had become unbearable to Katerina, but it was finally broken as Madame Ivanovna crashed into the opening chords.

Katerina had always danced with a marvelous display of proper technique. Her classical training was impeccable. Unfortunately, her dancing lacked any emotion. There seemed to be only one dimension to her reserved, cold image. Standing motionless on pointe, Katerina's posture would be perfect, her virtuosity apparent. However, her overall appearance was always unpleasantly chilling, and spectators felt as though they were observing a well-crafted ice sculpture.

Today, though, in a desperate attempt to alleviate the heavy tension in the air, Katerina danced almost frantically. She drifted smoothly across the room, raising her arms in a fluid, continuous flow of motion, then burst into a fiery display of stunning pirouettes. Scarcely aware of Ivan's grim, contemptuous expression, as he raised

her in a lift, Katerina continued to dance energetically until the last chord, when she froze in a smooth arabesque.

Suddenly, the room seemed loud. Katerina's heart thumped painfully, her blood pounding in her ears. She felt embarrassed of her wild display of emotion through her dance. "You danced to escape the situation, Kat," she told herself bitterly. "It was the coward's way out." Feeling as if she were an unsightly bundle of arms and legs, Katerina crossed the room to the barre, sensing Ivan's cynical eyes and the cold gaze of the four "judges" boring into her back.

Suddenly, Monsieur Du Bois spoke, breaking the agonizing silence. "I think that will do," he said curtly, crossing the room to stand facing Katerina and Ivan. "Ivan, a little more grace in that last jeté. Katerina, be careful with your last round of pirouettes; make sure they don't become sloppy." He continued to talk, relaying technical information in his dry, precise voice, while Katerina stood stunned. She felt conscious of an uncontrolled, idiotic grin spreading across her face and attempted to smooth her features into a correct blank, to match Ivan's attitude. Bewildered exhilaration welled up within her, behind her unconcerned, slightly bored outward mask. Somehow she had been accepted, though it seemed incomprehensible that her "judges" had liked her wild display.

Katerina left the rehearsal room, with only one coherent question in her mind: How on earth was she going to "get into" her role? To make it come alive? The three weeks before the performance passed swiftly, in a whirl of rehearsal. Katerina and Ivan spoke little or not at all during their practices together, both focusing intently on reaching technical perfection.

Performance night was filled with small disasters. Several of the corps de ballet had misplaced their costumes. A swan maiden had sprained her ankle, and Monsieur Du Bois grew increasingly snippy and irritable. Katerina remained calm as make-up was applied to her face, preparing for her entrance in Act I.

When the curtain rose, Katerina drifted on stage as the white-clad Odette, queen of the swans. She put great lyricism into the graceful movements of the bird-woman with whom Prince Siegfried falls in love, her unusual musicality rising to the surface. In an effort to ignore the audience and Ivan's cold disapproval, Katerina threw herself into her role. Odette was easy for her to portray: a swanlike representation of herself, noble and with a sweet expressiveness.

In the next Act, however, Katerina danced the part of Odile, the seductive and magnetic black-clad daughter of an evil magician who is determined to fool Siegfried into thinking her Odette. Katerina's mastery of Odile's difficult steps was superb; it was, instead, Odile's fire and searing intensity that had always eluded her in practices. Now she struggled to cause the mood to fluctuate constantly from fury and passion to total indifference, remaining elusive and enigmatic throughout.

Katerina began the Black Swan Waltz, with its dizzying round of 32 fouettés. "One..." she counted mentally. She thought of her struggles to enter dance school, her desperate search for a job that would pay for the expensive lessons. Katerina whirled

to the center of the stage, her black tutu as large a contrast to her surrounding as her manner now was to her frail, lovely Odette.

"Five..." The condescending remarks of her various dance partners ran through her brain. "You're too slow!"

"Show some spirit!"

"Don't you ever show any emotion?!"

She thought of Ivan, cold and distant, silently scornful, coming from a family that had money to spend for lessons. Plenty of it. Katerina lifted her chin, and her smile became dazzling as she forced the tension to leave her face.

"Ten..." Katerina remembered her countless hours spent practicing in small, stuffy studios. Her weariness after a long day of instruction, with little or no praise from her teacher. She thrust her leg out more firmly, striking out in a tight, fierce circle.

"Fifteen..." Failed auditions for lead roles, swollen ankles, bleeding toes. The return each night to a cramped house and a cold, sparse supper. Severe diets, hunger and day after day of toning exercises. Struggle against the temptation of weight-loss and mind-numbing drugs. Katerina flung her arms out, restoring her fouettés with frenzied vitality.

"Twenty..." Her fellow students' remarks, the most difficult to bear of all her troubles. "Good grief, girl, don't you ever say anything?"

"Do you think that 's dancing? You're like a wooden doll!"

Katerina's breath was coming rapidly now. Her legs were tired of whipping sharply around, and she felt dizzy. If she couldn't finish even this round of fouettés, how could she ever expect to be a dancer?

"Twenty-five..." Katerina realized that she was lagging. "What is it that always brings me down? Why do I always feel that I'm a failure?" The answer came quickly now. Her thoughts were what destroyed her dancing. She had no real confidence in her God-given ability to dance, and had ceased long ago to appreciate the beauty of ballet. Like a virtuoso musician, she was able to master her score, and yet she remained unmoved by its emotional depth.

"Thirty..." Suddenly, Katerina remembered Monsieur Du Bois' parting remark, at the end of her "trial" for the Odette/Odile role three weeks before. "You'll do, Katerina. But remember: don't ruin the beauty of the dance with poor dancing."

Katerina straightened her body, and brought her leg about sharply, with a final burst of energy. The dance lessons must have their reward. She had not spent money and time to show a feeble attempt, when given the chance, on stage.

"Thirty two!" Katerina spun into the last fouetté with a fierce display of virtuosity, excitement written across a triumphant face. She could dance! The bitter discouragement of the past only needed to be forgotten.

Katerina lifted her arms in a final arabesque, gracefully, contemplating her new dance lesson: to display the beauty of ballet, through her own dancing.

Indian Creek

It's the start of a new week. And I'm alone. Again. Being alone has kind of become my routine these past few years.

My name is Jenna Freeman. I'm a journalist and photographer for a small, privately owned magazine company called Ordinary Day. We write articles about ordinary people who have extraordinary stories. I know, it sounds overdone and cliché, but every once in a while you come across a person or a family who has a genuinely inspirational story to tell. Stories that help you remember life is a gift and it's worth living under any circumstance. It's a decent job and it pays the rent.

It's been seven years since I graduated college and moved out of my parents' house. Now I live in a little apartment on the corner of Shady and Arbor Boulevard in downtown New York City. I'm on tenth floor of the run down apartment complex, ironically named The Palace. Its only saving grace is I have a great view of the park outside my drafty bedroom window. I usually set my alarm early enough in the morning so I can watch the sunrise out of my window. It's so beautiful how it just rises up over the tree line and casts its deep orange glow over everything.

I love going into work early in the morning so I can watch everyone setting 55
up their shops and stores. The coffee shops and street vendors' carts give off a wonderfully distinct aroma. I don't really like the subway or taxis, so I walk to work every morning. It's not too far. It takes me about fifteen minutes. The early mornings just seem so fresh. I guess society hasn't tainted the atmosphere yet. Every once in a while I'll come home for my lunch break, so I can listen and watch the kids, who aren't in school either because it's the summer or their parents don't care if they're at school, play in the park. I love hearing their laughter and watching them see how high they can swing. The park always seems so safe and innocent during the day, but at night you couldn't drag me in that place for money.

I don't think the heater has worked properly since I moved into this place. If you ever need a blanket, just come over to my apartment. I have about ten extra ones. Course, if you really came over to visit, I don't know if I'd be the greatest hostess. Besides the landlord and the occasional confused drunk, I don't really get many visitors.

My parents came by the first year I moved in. They took one look at the place and told me they had some dinner date that they had to get back for. But I knew. I saw the look in my dad's eyes. It was that condescending disappointed look that he always would get. It was the same look on his face when I told him I wasn't going to attend Stanford University on the full academic scholarship that he had "worked so hard" for me to get. My dad is the chief of staff at Southeast Memorial Hospital in Chicago.

Apparently he got me into Stanford because of his "connections." I guess it had nothing to do with the fact that I scored a 1490 on my SAT and a 34 on my ACT, and not to sound egotistical, but I was a pretty good athlete. Stanford women's soccer coach told me I had a guaranteed spot on the team. So, I was considering playing soccer there too. That day in my newly moved in apartment, my dad just said he'd call me next week to see if I was settled or if I needed any money and then just turned around and walked out. I mean I guess not going to Stanford was still a deep wound for him, but I had my reasons. My dad was always pushing me to follow in his footsteps. That just wasn't the life I had planned out for myself. Not that I really had a plan. I just knew it wasn't going to consist of being a pre med student.

My mom had her signature look in her eyes too. Her eyes just started to well up with tears and she said, "I'm sorry Jenna, I need to go on down to the car. I don't want to make your father wait." She kissed me on the head and told me, "Your father is just tired. You know how he gets when he's had a rough week at the hospital. I'll see you soon, honey."

56 Well, that was about as empty of a promise as you'll ever hear. They haven't been back to my place since that day. I think I've seen them twice since then. Once for Thanksgiving six years ago. And once for Christmas five years ago. Oh, don't worry. I get the occasional phone call, which is usually just a voice mail. And it always seems to be the same message. It's my mom's voice saying, "Honey, it's your mom. I was just calling to see if there was anything you needed. You don't have to call back if you don't need anything. Your father and I are trying to work out a weekend where we can come up and visit you. I love you. Bye." After hearing that same message left ten times in a row, I started to doubt the sincerity of their plans to come and visit. Now the phone calls have pretty much stopped and I'm really surprised when I get a card in the mail remembering my birthday.

I wish they would allow pets in this place. It's not like they could make it smell any worse. I will say one thing. I've become obsessed with scented candles ever since I moved in here. So, at least my place smells good. Right now the scents are waterfall and fresh rain. I can't say too much for the hallway. It smells just like the locker room after a basketball game in high school. It's that smell of sweat mixed with mildew and whatever kind of bacteria or fungus that happens to be growing in the dark corners. You would think after seven years of living alone I would get use to the quiet and the loneliness, but sometimes it's still hard for me to fall asleep at night. I just lie down on my back and stare up at the ceiling until I finely bore myself to sleep. I know if I had a dog it wouldn't be so hard.

My apartment isn't so bad. It provides me with what I need, if you can get pass the sometimes creaky floors and drafty windows. I've covered most of the cracks and stains on the walls with Victorian prints and other famous paintings, along with some really beautiful scenic pictures. My favorite poster I have on my wall has to be

this black and white Larry Silver photograph of a lone runner in the distance running down this rain soaked road, surrounded on both sides by bare oak trees. Somehow in its dreariness, it seems so peaceful and gives me such a sense of freedom. I have a living room that opens up into a kitchen. And I have a bathroom with a toilet that works fine for the most part except the handle gets stuck every once and awhile. I also have a small closet that's like a giant junk drawer. I store everything that I don't have room for in the rest of my apartment, which is a lot, in there. I sleep on the pull out in the living room. I think I've actually made it very homey.

By now you're probably thinking I'm some sort of hermit who never gets out except to work behind a desk because they've been hurt and neglected as a child or have some deep wound that's never healed. But I'm not. I would never want that "please feel sorry for me" label. I get out when I want to. I make my own choices on how to live.

There's this place about two and a half hours south of the city out in the country that I like to drive to every weekend. Since I walk to work, this is where all my money goes. I've been making these trips for the last five years and they've been what's kept me sane. There's this running trail that I made up that goes for about seven miles through the woods, down by this creek, and then out in the open fields, and by some huge oak trees on this gravel pathway. I found it with a little help from a friend five years back when I was following a lead for a story.

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57

My boss, Mr. Hayes, is a kind man of about sixty. He still wears his same suits he probably wore back in the nineteen seventies. But he always has a nice tie to go with his suits. His hair is mostly white and gray, but you can still see some flecks of jet black hair that covered his whole head when he was younger. For being sixty, he is a fairly attractive man with a healthy looking tan and white smile. Mr. Hayes rarely changes his facial expression, which always seems to show that he has something on his mind. He always has gentle and kind words to say. Sometimes I wonder why he picked this small magazine company to head up when he graduated with a degree in Journalism and Marketing from Northwestern University in Chicago. But I think he's proud of his little magazine, that although only has a circulation of about 25,000, has a way of touching peoples' hearts that no other magazine does. And I guess that's why I've worked here for almost seven years.

Five years ago, I would say was probably one of the hardest times of my life and my career. I had finally come to the realization that my parents really wanted nothing to do with me and all they saw when they looked at me was a huge disappointment. Well, I guess I started believing that I was a failure too when I hadn't written a decent article in almost six months. Thank goodness for Mr. Hayes. He saved me with this lead he gave me about a family who had lost their house and three year old daughter in a tragic fire. They lived in Germantown about two and a half hours south of New York City. It was the first time I had actually been out of the city to write an article for

When I pulled up in my leased navy sport Jeep Cherokee at about 3pm that surprisingly warm day in September, I saw something that would forever change my perspective on life. It was a family of four that use to be of five, living out of their shed that had been spared from the fire. You could still see the remains of their burnt down house. The chimney was still intact and there were ashes and debris that still covered where the foundation of the home use to be. The father's name was Charles Williams and his wife's name was Kathryn. They had a little boy named Charlie who was ten and a baby girl about eight months old named Jordan.

Kathryn greeted me with a warm smile and offered me some ice tea before we sat down for the interview. I could tell by the father's firm handshake he was a hard worker. He worked in the paper factory in town and when he wasn't working there he was busy keeping up things on the farm. He was doing everything he could to earn back enough money to finish rebuilding their house. He had a grit and determination about him that was contagious. The lines in his face showed the hardships he had gone through. And the black under his nails and dirt on his clothes showed what a diligent worker he was. But he'd never let you know that. He was a humble man.

58 The townspeople had donated some money and given food to the Williams family. But it was a small, poor farm town and the people could only give so much. They had their own families to support. So Charles had to take on two jobs that caused him to almost never get to spend time with his family. You could tell it took its toll on Mrs. Williams and Charlie. I've never seen a son who aspired to be so much like his father. I watched him the entire afternoon I spent there interviewing for my article.

Mrs. Williams was the emotional support for the family. I don't know how she did it, having to take care of Charlie, the new baby, and grieving the loss of her first baby girl. Any other person I know, would've broken down under such tragic circumstances, but I honestly felt that the heartache is what drove her on. It's what made her stronger. I've never seen so much courage and dignity in a person.

Charlie looked like his father and you could tell he tried everything to be just like him. He dressed like him. He combed his hair the same way. He even tried to walk around the house and farm like him with his shoulders squared back, chest out, and always looking around with a protective eye. He had such an innocence about him. Just like the children in the park I would watch out my bedroom window. It was as if nothing harmful could touch him. Nothing could break him. Charlie did all the chores he was capable of doing around the house and farm. He helped his mom with Jordan whenever she needed him to and he never complained. He was a paper boy for the local paper and gave whatever money he earned to his dad to pay bills and help finish rebuilding the house.

I finished writing their story in late October. It came out in our November issue. If someone were to ask me which article that I've written I was most proud of,

it would be the one on the Williams family. Not because my writing was worthy of some sort of award, but because in interviewing them and seeing how they lived and how they grew stronger as a family after such a tragedy was such a personal reminder of how life is what you make it. We all have choices.

I kept in contact with the Williams after my story ran. They really appreciated the article and because of the recognition, they received several generous donations from readers of *Ordinary People*. They had a new house completely built by that Christmas and all their bills were paid off. Mr. Williams was able to go back to working one job. He focused on the farm and was able to spend some much needed time with his family.

I would go down and visit them every once and a while just to see how they were doing. There was something about them that just drew me back there. The last time I would visit the Williams family was three years ago. They had invited me out there for dinner. I of course jumped at the opportunity to leave my somewhat boring, drafty apartment to spend a day in the country with friends. Mrs. Williams had cooked up a great meal of fresh, homemade buttermilk biscuits, which I hadn't had since my grandmother passed away, green beans seasoned with bacon, corn, real mashed potatoes, not anything like the frozen attempt of store bought, which I normally dined with, and a roast. I was at a feast. I hadn't had a home cooked meal in quite some time. Charlie came down to the table a little late, which earned him a disciplinary look from his father. As we all sat there and ate ravenously in silence for the first ten minutes, Mr. Williams decided to start conversation. What was said sort of caught me off guard, but I think I was able to recover without being noticed too much.

59

He said, "So, tell me about your family. I don't think you've ever mentioned them."

"Well, they live in Chicago, where I grew up. My dad is the chief of staff at Southeast Memorial Hospital and my mom finds ways to keep herself busy."

I think they could all tell by my lack of detail and unenthusiastic tone I wanted to change the subject. There was a question that I had never asked the Williams because I was afraid to hear the answer. Afraid to come to the realization that my own family was so messed up or afraid to hear that even the seemingly perfect family had its flaws. I wasn't sure how either answer was going to affect me.

"You all have shown me your resilience to be able to come back so strong from such a tragedy. But behind closed doors, was there ever a moment where you felt completely hopeless? Where nothing was in your control? I mean, did you ever get angry with each other, or blame each other?"

Mrs. Williams sort of looked down at the table. Charles cleared his throat and pushed up his sleeves. Surprisingly, it was Charlie who answered first.

"I hated dad for letting the house burn down. He wasn't supposed to let any-

thing bad ever happen to us. And I didn't like it that mom stopped smiling like she use to. But then it was a week or so after the fire, and I remember taking care of Jordan for Mom and still feeling like we were a family. I was okay after that. Even though I lost my toy soldiers."

In those few words spoken by Charlie, I think he answered for the rest of the family. I left that night feeling relieved actually, that they had struggled.

I loved their family and I loved Germantown. But I wasn't a part of their family and I certainly wasn't going to keep inviting myself down to see them. So, call me crazy, but I had to make up a reason to get myself to go down there. The first week I went down there, Charlie had showed me this trail back in the woods that went down to this creek. He told me some legend about an old Indian chief, who was killed in an ambush, and was buried in the woods and every time you heard an owl hoot, it was the Indian chief calling out to his brother who had escaped the attack. He said the Indian chief's spirit was in the owl because it was one of the smartest birds and its night vision was better than any other animal. So, when I came back again, I decided I'd see where the trail went. That's how I came up with my seven mile running trail. And this became my excuse for coming back. To run the Indian creek trail. It's how I've still remained in a distant way a part of the Williams family, if only by revisiting familiar sights and finding strength in their closeness.

60

Mr. Hayes, my boss, passed away this last week. I gave his eulogy. It was difficult, but in it, I found such a sense of peace in being able to put his life into words. Mr. Hayes was the man who gave me my first chance. He also gave me my second chance with the Williams story. He knew the value of family and also what it was to feel completely alone. He had lost his wife five years ago, but through it, somehow remained the same thoughtful man he'd been before, seeing the best in any person.

It wasn't as if I made some huge revelation about life. But I realized that life doesn't have to be lonely. It doesn't have to be depressing. Even when I can't fall asleep in my drafty apartment. I learned I was lonely even in a crowd. I was searching for something. Maybe a sense of belonging and a desire to be needed. Life is all about challenges and how we react to them. I don't have to be angry with my dad for wanting me to follow in his footsteps. I don't need to blame my mom for never defending me and always siding with him.

Today Charlie turned fifteen. Today I decided, family is much more important than pride. Today I went home for the first time in five years and decided to give myself and my family a much needed second chance.

Generations

The air inside the large, well-lit tool shed was cool and sweet. Jaimey sat inside on a stool near the entrance, gazing out the double doors, which were flung open to allow the fading light in. Outside a soft breeze shook leaves on the trees and the sinking sun cast long shadows on the grass.

At the back of the shed Grandpa was noisily rummaging through a cluttered pile of tools and garden equipment and humming a chorus of "Amazing Grace." Jaimey leaned over a white, cardboard box, brimming with apples. To his right and left sat more boxes, whose contents all needed to be cleaned before put through the press. His hands and knife were sticky and his white t-shirt and blue jeans covered with the juice of Macintosh and Red and Golden Delicious and other varieties, whose names he'd forgotten.

He worked slowly, sullenly. Right now his friends were probably getting ready to head over to the Haunted Cornfield. That's where he'd be right now if not for this. He started going over an excuse to give them-anything but that he was making apple cider with his Grandfather. That would be too easy for them. No, instead he'd just tell them a "family affair" had come up and leave it at that. Hopefully, they wouldn't push.

Jaimey tossed a perfect-looking apple into the green bucket hugged between his legs. He picked up another out of the box. This one needed serious surgery. Using Grandpas' Old Timer he carved away worm tunnels and bee holes and rotten splotches-all things that would make the apple unfit for cider. Some apples were unsalvageable and these he would hurl out the shed doors and back into the orchard, with the rest of their bad siblings.

He had just started working on another leprous piece of fruit when his knife slid through it and across his left palm. Blood immediately followed, running through his fingers and down his arm. He tried to stifle a "damn't" but Grandpa caught it.

"What's wrong?" he asked turning around. The blood was dripping from Jaimey's hand into the bucket holding the recently cleaned apples.

"Nothing." He kicked the bucket away so the blood would drip onto the concrete floor instead. "Justa cut."

"Well lemme see it," Grandpa said coming up from behind. Jaimey held out his bleeding hand and Grandpa gave a low whistle. "Yes, you did cut it good now didn't ya? You shore did. You'll be alright, let's go over to the sink and wash it up."

Jaimey allowed Grandpa to lead him over to a small sink. The basin was green with age and it smelled of rotten eggs. But its water was clear and cold and took the

sting away. Grandpa pulled a worn, white handkerchief from the back pocket of his overalls.

"This will slow the bleeding for now," he said winding the cloth tightly around Jaimey's hand. "Now go on inside the house so Grandma can fix ya up proper."

Outside, the October sun had almost disappeared behind the horizon. Only a fraction of it remained, flooding the west a brilliant red, which receded slowly upwards, first orange, then yellow and finally, blue. Jaimey trudged through the orchard towards his grandparent's white, two-story farmhouse, dodging and kicking the apples that had fallen prematurely. Most of them were completely rotten or probably so infested with bees that you wouldn't want to touch them. He glanced at his indiglo watch. 9 p.m. He'd only been here for an hour but it felt like longer.

The ride over had been an unpleasant one. His father had tried to explain why this thing was so important—something about family traditions. Jaimey had shut him out; stared out his window and let the golden rows of corn blur in his vision. He was used to tuning out his father, usually during his long soliloquies about the importance of family and how friends should come second to it. Every once in a while he'd say, "Ya got that son?" and Jaimey would nod, hoping it would be the end of the speech.

62 When he'd finally got to Grandpa's, he let out a sigh of relief. His father had stopped talking a while back and they had spent the rest of the ride in awkward silence.

"So you'll call me when you guys are finished, right?" his father said. Jaimey nodded and slammed the pick-up truck door shut.

Grandpa had been waiting for him in the shed. He sat at a steel tool bench drinking coffee and giving his Old Timer's a turn on the whetstone. When Jaimey asked what he was doing he just handed him one of the sharpened knives and put him straight to work cleaning apples and instructing him to cut away as little as necessary.

Cleaning apples is such a mundane task, he thought suddenly looking around the orchard, why would someone want so many of these trees? Then again, why would anyone want to spend their whole night making apple cider in the first place? As his thoughts turned to Libby, he grew angrier. Libby Tucker was one of his friends who were going to the Haunted Cornfield. Lately she had been acting very friendly with Jaimey and had seemed particularly concerned over whether he was going with them that night. Like an idiot he'd promised her he was going and now, he could only think that she was probably pressing her cute and terrified face into another guy's chest. He cursed aloud this time, kicked at a rotting apple and hurried towards the house.

He found Grandma Jeane in the living room, sitting in her rocker watching "Wheel of Fortune" and holding needlework. The picture on the cloth was only half done, but Jaimey could see the familiar tops of three crosses jutting into a blue sky.

"Um, Grandma..." he said not wanting to startle her. She turned.

"Hi there, hon," she said laying the cloth aside. "How's everything going out there?"

"Oh, everything's fine, it's just that I, uh, cut my hand and..."

"Oh you boys and your knives!" she said rising. "Well come on into the kitchen so I can take a look at it."

Jaimey followed the aged woman into the spacious kitchen and sat down at the dining table. In front of him, lying open on the table, was Grandma's old, leather Bible, its pages wrinkled and worn. In the margins he could see where she had scribbled endless notes and references to other verses. Every once in a while were the words "PRAISE JESUS," followed by a series of exclamation points and an arrow pointing to an underlined verse.

"Oh I'm so glad you came tonight, Jaimey," Grandma said pulling up a chair beside him and laying gauze, cotton balls and antiseptic on the table. "You wouldn't believe how Grandpa has been goin' on and on about tonight."

Jaimey didn't say anything. Grandma held a cotton ball against the mouth of the antiseptic bottle and tipped it upside down. Jaimey untied the handkerchief from around his hand, held out his palm and winced as Grandma swabbed it gently with the stinging fluid. She went on.

"This cider-making thing is very important to him ya know?" Jaimey nodded dumbly. "He's done it every year that I've known him. Says that his Grandpa, your Great-great-grandpa Silas, taught him how to make cider when he was about...well, about your age, I reckon." She began to wrap gauze around his hand. "There's something about apples and cider and the fall that make him nostalgic. That cider press of his...have you see it yet?" Jaimey shook his head. "That thing's over 100 years old. It's been in his family for almost five generations now, but he may tell ya more about it himself."

63

He nodded again. His mind had gone into the same mode it did when his father spoke to him. He didn't know why this stuff bored him so much. Family traditions and such. This was stuff that he would gladly trade in for a night with Libby and the gang. He was young, so why would a 100-year old cider press be so fascinating to him?

"Well, I think that about it does it," said Grandma wrapping a final piece of gauze around his hand and fastening it with a safety pin. He got up to leave. "Here's something for you guys to munch on while you're working." She handed him a heaping plate of chocolate chip cookies. "Now don't you go cutting yourself again and you tell that Grandfather of yours to lay off the whetstone. Always thinks those knives of his have to be so sharp..."

She was still talking as Jaimey bounded down the porch steps and into the darkness.

By the time he got back Grandpa had found what he'd been looking for. Sitting in the center of the glowing tool shed was an ancient cider press. The simple

contraption, composed of wood and iron, rose just as high as Grandpa's chest. To Jaimey it looked like some crude instrument of torture. Encased in an iron frame was a large wooden barrel, its sides brown from countless years of use. Over the barrel hung two mechanisms: the grater, which could be operated by rotating an iron crank; and the press, an iron shaft, which could be lowered and raised inside the bucket by twisting two handles at the top.

There it is, thought Jaimey, the reason I'm here tonight and not with my friends.

"So did Grandma take care of that hand for ya?" asked Grandpa. Jaimey nodded and held out his freshly bandaged hand. "Well, that looks pretty good," he said. "As you can see, I finished cleaning up a few apples for ya. I think four boxes will be enough, don't you?"

Jaimey was amazed. In the short while he'd been gone, this old man had cleaned twice as many apples as he.

"Sure...I mean, I guess...you're the expert an all," he said.

"Ok," said Grandpa chuckling, "let's lug some over and start gratin 'em."

Jaimey dragged one of the apple-filled buckets over to the press and began filling the grater. Grandpa was busy lining the barrel with a white, plastic sac.

"What's that for?" Jaimey asked.

64 "It's for when we're ready to press," he said. "Once the ground up bits of apple have fallen into the barrel, you need somethin' to keep the seeds and cores and such out of the juice. The sac is perforated. The holes are large enough to let the liquid out but small enough to keep the bigger stuff in. You see that hole at the bottom of the barrel?" Jaimey nodded. "That's where the cider will come out. Once we start pressing we'll slide this pan under it to catch it all. You got it?"

Jaimey nodded again and they began. They worked quickly now-Jaimey turning the squeaking crank, sending bits of apple showering down into the barrel and Grandpa, lowering and raising the iron shaft, which crushed the juicy matter into pulp. They worked well together too, keeping a fluid rhythm of grating and pressing, ensuring a steady flow of dark brown liquid from the barrel to the pan. Every once in a while they would stop to scoop some of the sticky pulp out of the barrel and make room for fresh apple. Once the pan was full, Jaimey would carry it up to the house for Grandma to boil it. When he would return, there would be Grandpa, ready and waiting to do it all over again.

Grandpa didn't talk about the cider press or even his grandfather. The two worked mostly in silence, but it was a good silence, one that was only broken by an intermittent grunt or occasional chuckling over how much physical exertion went into cider making. It was surprising to Jaimey how many apples it took to fill one pan of cider. Before he knew it, he was tossing the last of the cleaned apples into the grater.

"Well that's it," he said wiping the sweat off his brow with the back of his sleeve. "How much cider do you think we've made tonight?"

"Hm...I reckon a little over four gallons."

Jaimey shook his head. "All this work for just four gallons?"

Grandpa winked at him. "C'mon, let's go see how it tastes. If it's good cider, it'll all have been worth it." He handed him the final pan, flicked off the shed lights and they started towards the house.

It was late when Jaimey got home that night, but surprisingly, the kitchen light was still on. Grandpa had driven him home in his old Chevy Blazer and had given him, along with two jugs of cider, careful instructions on drinking it.

"Now don't wait too long to finish these off," he said, "or they'll start to taste bitter."

Jaimey promised he wouldn't, said good night and started up the gravel lane to his house. His mom was still awake. She sat at the kitchen table in her nightgown, sipping hot chocolate.

"Hey there bud, so did you have any fun tonight after all?" she asked.

"It was ok I guess," he said setting the jugs of cider in the fridge.

"Well, while you were gone Miss Libby Tucker called you three times and..."

"What? Libby called? Well did she leave a message or something?"

"Yes, yes," she said. "It's right here, says to call her when you get home."

Jaimey grabbed the note and leapt up the stairs to his room. He picked up the phone and flopped onto his bed.

"Hello, Libby? This is Jaimey. Hi...my mom told me you called. This isn't too late is it? Oh ok, good. So how was the Haunted Cornfield? Yeah. Uh huh. Really? That's too bad, it sounded pretty cool. No, I couldn't go after all. Yeah, a family thing, well...actually I was helping my Grandpa. With what? Um...well, you won't believe this but..."

65

Judge's Comments

This is a very small story, and I think that's one of its strengths. Cressman creates a whole world for his readers and develops rich, sympathetic characters in very few pages—that's what a short story's supposed to do! The conflict that Cressman establishes rings true and the resolution of his story is satisfying and touching without being sentimental. This is fine work.

The Thousand Folds

The metal was hot. The soft, laminated steel folded quickly. His hammer fell. Clang! Fire erupted from the dense, black coal, and it sent waves of heat to beat against his skin like the incoming tide on the coast of Japan. The forge's draft was to him a divine wind, a kamikaze. Inside his twilight forge, the encompassing shadows were his only companions.

The metal was hot. The steel folded quickly. His hammer fell. Clang! The smoke billowed, but his white priestly robes remained untarnished. His fasting, prayer, and purification aided in his mystical trade. Ash and soot surrounded him. It invigorated his work.

The metal was hot. It folded quickly. His hammer fell. Clang! The blade took shape. He knew his weapon would be excellent. However, his soul lamented. It could not be his.

His hammer fell, to the ground.

66 "Why? Why does Amaterasu torture me?" He bellowed into the shadows surrounding him. "Does the sun goddess delight in my strife? Why must that day always haunt me? Why am I discontent with my station in life? Any man in the empire would gladly take my place, the place of the master smith. I have been taught to value the life I was born into. I should be content with my position. I am not."

His hands cupped his face trying to hold back his tears, as a terrace would earth. But even this would not hold back his memories, memories of his first work, his first love. Then, they surrounded him.

The sword was finished. It had taken him much longer than the forge master, but then when making your first sword that was to be expected. It was a meticulous process. This sword was a masterpiece, each fold in perfect dimension, the harmonious blend of a hard edge with a soft blade. He caressed the sword's handle in his hand. The spirit of the sword touched him. He did not want to let it go. This was his first sword and he would cherish it always. It would, from then on, remain slung from his left hip, a bright and silent testament to his duty to his Emperor.

The luminous sun cast long shadows over the island. One of these shadows rode near to the forge, even as the smith was cradling his creation. The rider addressed the master of the forge that he was there to receive his first katana.

"I am to be guard to the emperor. I am to travel with him. I am to keep our emperor from harm. I will watch the gates to his court. It is my duty," he informed the master of the forge.

"Amaterasu has favored you and so I shall favor you," replied the master. "Come to me," he called to the smith. "You are honored for yours is the blade chosen to defend the emperor!"

"Why," he asked, "must mine be chosen? Are there not many skilled crafts-

men here? Choose another blade!"

"You question too much. Give him the sword. Your emperor commands it!"
And with that the pain began.

As his memories retreated into the darkness he felt that pain reinforced with the memories of each sword he made, and then gave away. His memories released him now for it was nearly dawn.

The Metal was hot. The soft steel folded smoothly. His hammer fell. Clang! Today would be different. Oh, how he had told himself that a thousand times and each time it was untrue.

"Today I keep my masterpiece. All of Japan reveres my position. I have held it for too long."

The metal was hot. The steel folded smoothly. His hammer fell. Clang!

"Today is all I have, I must strike outward. The youthful guard who finds himself at my doorstep today shall not leave it, for if it is not today, then, it will never be tomorrow."

The metal was hot. The steel folded. His hammer fell. Clang!

"Yes! Today I begin where Amaterasu truly needed me!"

Hot. Fold. Fall. Clang!

Hot. Fold. Fall. Clang!

The smith heated the soft blade and the hard edge. Even in the coming dawn there was sufficient darkness for his task. The weapon emitted a fiery red tone. It was nearly finished. The young guard was riding near.

The smith took wet clay and packed it around the soft area of the blade leaving the hard, sharp, and brittle edge unprotected. The heat of the blade was sponged away with the clay granting the katana ceramic armor.

"He will understand. Youth always understands hope."

The blade was heated a final time, and the hard, sharp, brittle edge nearly sung out in pain. The clay hardened into a firm barrier.

"He will relieve me. He will take my place."

With the swing of a firm and vigorous swordsman he plunged the complete blade into a barrel of water. Steam blasted out of the barrel. The edge sung no more.

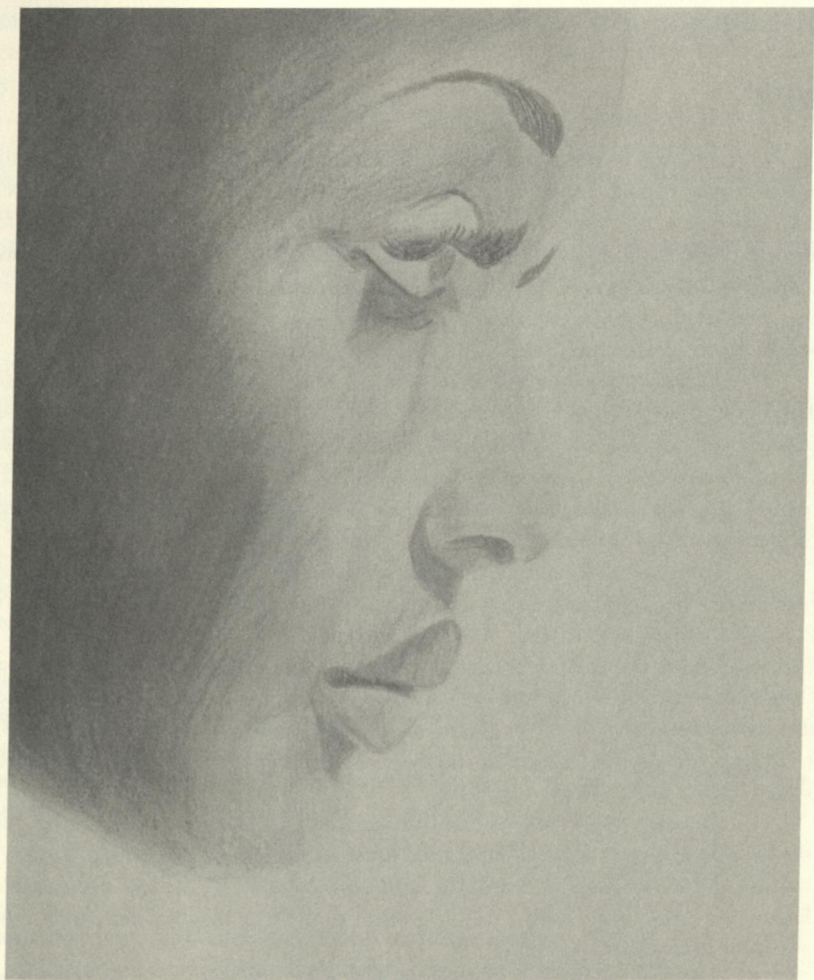
"He will welcome what I offer I am sure of it!"

With another graceful and arcing crescent the ceramic shield was shattered upon the anvil, releasing the heat of the blade itself. A lengthened shadow in the rising sun came into view.

"He will let me retain you, my love, I am sure."

The smith took the katana, his finest work, and held the handle in his callused left hand, steadied by his right. The edge crossed over his chest from left to right. His knees bent and he approached the ground. The tip of the sword tasted blood as it grazed over the smith's soft skin. Without his hands to hold them back his tears ran through the cracks in his face. The youth was in view and his hands were not callused. The sun rose

"I am here."



Essay

Seattle

Ten days before, I had been a New Yorker. It wasn't me-which was a surprise, and in truth, a relief. It had been a hard summer and I was still tasting the liberation from playing a role that didn't fit. I had felt like Cinderella that summer, feeding mouths of children who were not my own. The loneliness of being 1500 miles away in a world of Mercedes and Bentleys, designer fashions, cocktail parties with valet parking, and beach clubs advertising a life of pure mirth for those who could afford the Southampton Bath and Tennis Club's \$80,000 membership fee.

I wanted to forget the anxiety that I often awoke with at 8 in the morning, wondering how the boys I took care of, George and John, would behave. Would there be any tantrums, and would Johnny climb out the 2nd story window of the white summer home on Foster Crossing one more time? (The house I so often dreaded going back to after a weekend at my aunt's house in Poughkeepsie, or after a morning spent in petition for spiritual strength at the Golden Pear Café.)

70 I shuddered in the midst of this recollection here in my rose colored bedroom in Hudsonville, Michigan. What was the point of me being there? I thought. Why was it that I had wanted to take nanny position in New York City in the first place? Initially, I think it had been because I had pleaded God to get me out of Indiana, away from the familiar sidewalk paths meandering on campus. Away from people who knew my name and knew that I struggled to be happy and get out of bed for class in the morning. Yes, I think I was on a search for something... something that went beyond Pick-a-Dates and a Dean's List GPA.

But why New York? When I had prayed that past November, "God, please let me be able to live in a NYU-subsidized brownstone loft in Greenwich Village, taking writing classes, working at Starbucks, and witnessing to all the lost postmodern secularists you bring in my path," it didn't occur to me that maybe God would remember pieces of that prayer. Go figure.

Yet now on this fall day, September 20th, safe and sound in Salad Bowl City (Hudsonville's term of endearment), I realized that God really had heard and he really had answered my prayer-well, at least the "New York" part of it he got down. Yes, I got to visit NYU, but I didn't take writing classes there nor did I stay in a Greenwich Village brownstone. Part of me, in hindsight, held a grudge that he didn't remember my full request.

Perhaps, now, Seattle would be different. I had to wonder what all this travelling was about-what it was supposed to teach me-because New York certainly hadn't lived up to my expectations. I was as restless as ever, ready to try on a new town, and I would learn from it what I wanted. I think that's what I liked about travelling-I was able to pick and choose what I wanted to take, yet leave just in time to avoid disap-

pointment. Good thing my stay in Seattle would only be 2 fi months... yet was this time enough to make any lasting connections? Somehow, though, deep roots weren't exactly a priority then.

I sighed a deep breath of weariness and I began scrutinizing each item as it went into the suitcase. I didn't like how I was feeling-a nervous compulsion to prove something to myself. My golden retriever, Cassie, pushed open my oak door and rambled in, sensing my need for companionship. Maybe I should stay home, I thought, as I ruffled her soft ears. This change is just too much right now. Not to mention the fact that boarding a plane for the West Coast made me a little nervous, considering September 11th had only been nine days ago.

Deciding it wouldn't be wise to forfeit a \$ 300 plane ticket, I began a mental list of the remaining things I needed: Aquafresh, Q-tips, rain gear, hiking boots, my Bohemian white cotton shirt. As I examined the clothing going into my suitcase, I was secretly embarrassed that I was so conscious of the image each item would project. I wasn't really that superficial, and I felt somewhat ashamed of the ultra-chic edge I had picked up in New York that summer. Like the New Yorkers, maybe I was using fashion as a display to represent the person I truly was inside: if people didn't like what they saw in the first place, they wouldn't have to waste their time. No one got hurt that way. Underneath it all, my real fear was that there wouldn't be room for me in Seattle-just like how I had felt in New York; often how I felt in Upland, Indiana.

So I continued to hand-pick the pieces of myself that I thought would best assure the "fitting in" process. I wanted so badly for others to recognize my individuality; yet ironically, I obsessed over the essentials needed to fit a certain Seattle mold: a ceramic coffee mug, slightly misshapen, filled with over-roasted Starbucks; a writer's notebook worn at the edges with Pearl Jam and Nirvana stickers; cable-knit sweaters; frayed corduroys, and an appreciation for soy milk and granola.

In the process, I felt a twinge of high school déjà vu and a fear that accompanied it in these moments when it seemed like I had not progressed beyond adolescent egocentrism, despite my twenty years. I hadn't been this concerned about my appearance since my sophomore year crush on James Norton. He had been the mysterious, winsome type who never intended for his unruly yellow curls to be such a stumbling block for girls. His musical aspirations I so admired and his attention I so coveted, that my obsession drove me to sign up for weekly guitar lessons for the whole year thereafter.

I decided I was finished impressing the James Nortons of the world; I was going to a new place and there was freedom in being the "new girl". There was so much I wanted to let go of, and an escape to Seattle seemed to be just the thing. All I hoped to accomplish and heal from played through my mind as I sat in the terminal at Kent County Airport at 6:15 in the morning. Yet the illusion that America was strong and secure, able to comfort the heavy-hearted, had been shattered nine days

before. We now had our own baggage to deal with.

I diverted my eyes to a young man dressed in a Navy uniform-one whom I had seen earlier in line at the ticket counter. He had piqued my interest as he had been rooted next to a man who appeared to be his father, his thin lips firmly pressed into a seal. I laughed inwardly, as he looked so silly just standing there like an inanimate object in his white uniform with its pleated collar and blue neck-tie-like a little kid who hated how his momma had dressed him for Halloween. For some reason, I felt like I knew this person-or would soon, at least. As I watched him, I experienced the sense of ESP that I sometimes get when I inwardly believe a person will become significant to me in some way.

Boarding my plane, I meandered down to seat 14A and that same young man closely followed; 14B was his destination. His lips surprisingly curled into a lop-sided grin as he introduced himself: John was his name. After a few exchanges, I found out after connecting in Chicago, he too was headed out to the state of Washington, for naval training on Whidbey Island.

"Wow," I said in admiration, "Will it be hard to leave your family?"

"Nah," he said as he studied me. "I'm the youngest and it's just my mom and dad left." He looked off into the distance. "It will be good to get out of this hick-town. This opportunity is really the only thing that will get me anywhere in life and keep me outta that shit I used to do... boozin' it up, partying. Just bein' trash." John shook his head, "There's just nothin good up in that trash hick town. I'm just lucky I have a chance to get out, ya know. Man, else I'd be real screwed." As he spoke, he seemed to be talking only to himself, convincing himself of something ... something he wasn't even quite sure of himself.

Apparently quite comfortable with spilling his guts to a stranger he had just became acquainted with five minutes ago, he said that he had dropped out his sophomore year of high school because his life was messed up and it was the drugs' fault. It had been a hard time for him, he said. A very dark, low point for him.

"Scribbling out homework assignments was the least of priorities back then, ya know what I mean." He laughed and studied me some more, waiting to see if what he had divulged had made me uncomfortable and if I would choose to politely close the conversation and enjoy the window seat I had requested.

My silence didn't scare him and he continued. "So what're you goin' out to Seattle for? Got a boyfriend out there or somethin'?"

"No, I'm going out there for school. I'm taking a semester off from the school I attend in Indiana."

"Ahhh. Indiana," he nodded, empathizing with my need to flee.

"Yeah, you know, I just really needed to get away. There's not much to do there either, and I'm ready to experience the culture of a city. Maybe do a little soul-searching while I'm at it."

John nodded. He could relate. That's what his whole life had been-one long search for his soul. But his narrowed raven eyes told me he was still searching. "So do

you think you'll like it out there? Are you into grunge rock and coffee?"

I laughed at his fairly accurate appraisal of me. "Not so much the grunge anymore.... But I love Pearl Jam and hole-in-the wall coffee shops. Coffee's definitely a vice of mine."

As if on cue, the stewardess dutifully offered us complimentary beverages. "What kind of beverage would you like, miss?" she inquired sweetly, her tired smile an attempt to meet airline standards.

I gave a knowing look to John and he returned it with a smirk. "Coffee, please."

I had a tendency to drink coffee when I wasn't feeling so secure-when I needed the hand-to-mouth motion to keep me conscious of my place in the external world. A sip every 22 seconds somehow provided a quality of steadiness to whatever I was doing.

John accepted a Coke and refreshed his question. "So do you think you'll like it out there, or what?"

"Honestly, I'm not really sure what to expect-other than what the Seattle stereotype tells me. Oddly enough, I think that's what can be so comforting about stereotypes. A person knows exactly what to expect."

He shook his head, "Nah. It's the expectations that'll kill ya. If you don't have any expectations, you'll never be disappointed."

I thought about what he said and it made sense. Too much sense, though, if you know what I mean. No room left for life or true pleasure. A life of indifference. "Yeah, you would never be disappointed, I guess. But indifference comes with a major loss-you'd never be able to really feel anything. Bad or good."

John said from his experience, it was definitely far better to miss out on pleasure than to live in pain. I wasn't so sure. Not that I could truly relate to the depth of his numbness, but I had felt misunderstanding and rejection before, too. But the key was in my faith, I told him stoutly: "I always trust the Lord to carry me through." Yet something still and small responded within me, "Why, then, do you keep running...?"

It was rainy and the soggiess tired me, even as I awoke from a full night's sleep of eight-and-a-half hours. Definitely needed a latte to start the morning out right.... I crawled out of bed, glad to see my roommate Jessica, a transfer student to Seattle Pacific from Idaho, had not yet emerged from the cavern of her lower bunk. She was a bright and cheerful girl with fiery red stick-straight hair. Jessica loved punk music because it was "happy" and "fun"; she affixed smiley face patches to her JanSport backpack and she liked to spend the evenings watching "reality" dating shows. Yet her propensity for long walks outside when it was raining in the evening, and the way she spilled her hidden thoughts and fears to me when the lights were turned out told me she had threads of melancholy woven in her sanguine smile.

We found out we had something in common during those late night pillow talks. We both loved to live vicariously through travelling from place to place in search of connection, yet somehow always ended up disappointed and spilling our wounded hearts out on the page. When Jessica's smile was tired, her melancholy kicked in and she liked to read John Steinbeck and watch *Of Mice and Men*. She convinced me to watch it, knowing I, too, was melancholic. I cried hard at the end of the movie. I think for the first time in awhile. Reality so jarring, yet somehow oddly refreshing to me—a bleak reminder of the frailty of life.

These encounters, as well as trips to the mission on the east side of Seattle, reminded me that there was something so poignantly universal about human experience: we all needed something so desperately, but there were some of us who would admit and some who wouldn't. It was curious to me that the people who often were most comfortable with admitting it were those at the shelter. They didn't have a clean-cut image to maintain; one could read their plea for love right on their faces. Their wrinkled hands reached out and said "thank you." They weren't afraid to ask for help because it was the only way they knew to survive.

74 Sadly, sometimes it was easier to just put out the good parts for people to look at, and stuff the rest in a tattered diary underneath a bed. I think I was realizing, though, that authenticity was worth taking the risk for. I needed others to see who I was, dirt under my fingernails and all. That it was necessary to have expectations in life, but maybe the only one that really mattered was the expectation that there was One who would arrange for my security on earth. That I didn't need to always put my best foot forward—that maybe putting out a wrinkled hand would be get me further....

Yes, we as humans—Jessica and I in Seattle, John on Whidbey Island, George and John in New York, my parents in Salad Bowl City, Marylou and Robert at the mission—needed to clasp tightly to our Father's hand, while opening the other to someone else who was a little further behind on the journey, whether we had two good feet to put out in front of us or only two callused hands to beg with.

Notes on Topography

I do not know if I have ever seen a hogback. Or a fjord. I have never seen the alluvial deposits at the mouth of a delta, though I can find the Nile delta on a map. I do not know the difference between a hillock and a hummock. I have never seen an archipelago; I do not know if I could pronounce it correctly. I think I stood on a promontory once. . .

There is little distinction between the terms valley and vale. Nor is there much of a difference between vale and dale--either one may mean nothing more than a low place or a drainage area between hills. (To be perfectly fair, the dale is more likely to have a river running through it, though the vale may have this feature as well). The chief distinction between the two seems to be that there is no such thing as a "mortal dale of tears."

As far as I can tell from strict definition, upland and highland mean about the same thing, and choosing between them is mostly a matter of region and taste. Both describe raised areas of land, out of danger of flooding, and suggest a rural area of the country. Upland is also a term for a region in which uncouth rustics are said to live--but you didn't hear it from me. 75

Dune and Down. Cay and Key. Shoot and chute. Copse and Coppice. All the same.

Caves and caverns, on the other hand, though described by essentially similar words, are more dissimilar in character. The cave is no more than a space underground--a hole, a mere hole, would suffice. The cave does not even have the grotto's distinction of being "typically picturesque." However, the cavern is a more romantic affair; the key lies in its mystery: "often large or indefinite in extent."

Beware of bogs. If I was you, I would go immediately to the nearest bookstore, and pluck up a copy of *The Field Guide to Marshes and Bogs*. You will need to know the difference.

In either a marsh or a swamp, you will find water-logged ground, soft and spongy underfoot. A fen is peaty, but otherwise much the same. A morass may sound horrible, but its definition is no different than any of the others.

The word bog is nice for poets, suggesting easy rhymes, like fog and frog and grog, but to the practical soul, it is the more dangerous. It carries the distinction of being the only variety of swamp in which, according to the dictionary, "a heavy body is likely to sink."

The wisdom of our forefathers tells us it is possible to make a mountain out of a molehill, but, until recently, I did not realize it was possible for a mole to make a mole out of a molehill, which is essentially saying the same thing. In addition to meaning a small, blind, burrowing creature (or, derogatorily, a man who shares those characteristics), a mole may also be a mound—a small hill or knoll. It is frequently made of masonry, suggesting a connection with its animal namesake, but this is not always the case.

I think I would like a knoll, if I ever got to meet one. The Dictionary calls it a small, round, "land eminence." I will remember that, in case the opportunity to be presented to a knoll should arise one day. I will want to be able to address it properly: "your Eminence."

A mound is topography for the unambitious. It takes very little to have a mound.

The world is full of lonely topographies--and lonelier still, because we have forgotten their rightful names. A butte, for example, is that isolated hill with sides so steep it appears like a spire on the horizon. An escarpment, besides being pleasantly challenging to pronounce, is a ridge of rock isolated between two level surfaces, just as the isthmus is the narrow land stretching between larger tracts of water. A brae, used chiefly in Scotland, is a single hill along the banks of a river, and comes from the Old English for "eyebrow."

76

The barrow, in particular, is in a funny fix. Once the word meant nothing more or less than a type of hill or mountain, but now, outside of Britain, the word specifies a burial mound--a tomb. Only within Britain does the word still denote the original meaning.

Which means: the world may be full of barrows that have forgotten their own names, and we have forgotten them too. Now they are called mere hills, hillocks, or hummocks. Now disavowed, they wait to be reinstated. I imagine the scene: A family of hikers, traipsing along a rocky path that overlooks some hilly and uneven ground.

Son: Look, Mom, a hill!

Mother: Why, no, son. I do believe that's a barrow.

Father: By George! You're right. It's the most obviously barrowish barrow I've ever seen.

Son: And we discovered it. Thanks, Mom and Dad. I love you.

That will be a happy day for the little lost barrow: to be called by name and acknowledged once more.

Still, the lonely topographies seem to be better off in other respects. Seclusion, for example, is a commodity. A small, secluded valley is a glen. A small valley out in the open is a ditch. Here's to seclusion.

As a child, the closest thing I ever had to a thinking place was a small enclosure between two evergreen shrubs on the border between our property and that of the

neighbors. Privately, I called it "the thicket," a word I derived from the Bambi book and tape set to which I used to listen. I was not far off. A thicket, it turns out, is a dense, almost impenetrable growth of shrubbery, in the center of which may be a clearing.

A spinney may come even closer in meaning. Although a much friendlier sounding term, "spinney" is derived from the Latin word for thorn: *espine*--a spinney is a thicket overgrown with thorns. And mine was. Crawling into the small space in the hedge, I tangled my hair on the prickles of the bushes.

There are many words for such enclosures: copse, grove, dell. Most of these are fenced in by trees. A grove, in particular, is special. Technically, it is any small stand of trees, usually free of undergrowth; but aesthetically, a grove is the very personification of dignity. Whether a matter of chance or design, a grove is recognized by an overriding sense of artistry.

Also, there is the matter of the dingle. Like the grove, the copse, and the dell, it is a secluded enclosure, shielded by trees. Unlike them, it is mysterious and rare. Somewhere in the world, there is one last (real, honest-to-goodness) dingle. The very last.

If we have lost our connection to nature, if we have ceased to find dryads behind every tree, frolicking nymphs beside every pool and satyrs in all the rosebushes, I submit that it is because they have all gone looking for the very last dingle. Or else they have all found it, and they are busy gamboling about and carrying on-- throwing bonfires and parties, and wearing circles in the turf with all their cavorting and jollification. It is a silly place.

77

Moor and heath are best known for being agriculturally unfavorable. "This land is useless," a farmer out of the dark ages of the past once said. And he called it the "Moor," spelling it carefully, as if to indicate the same principle that your mother once pointed out: you might want seconds of dessert, but you certainly wouldn't want more desert.

Plain and Lea fair better. Lea is characterized by especial fertility, and while there is no such specific distinction to Plain, it receives favor for its clean, frank appearance, freedom from artifice, and eagerness to be useful.

An ait is a tiny island. It bathes in the sun and dreams of becoming an archipelago when it grows up. An atoll is the protrusion of a coral reef above the surface of the water. Usually, it takes the form of a ring, embracing and enclosing a lagoon.

Enigmatic, paradoxical, the river is the answer to the riddle: "What has a bed but never sleeps? Has a head but never weeps? Has a mouth but never talks? Runs and runs but never walks?"

The paradox is in the running. As a condition of its classification as a River, it must always go and always stay. A flow of water that is seasonal, as with the melt-

ing of the snow or the coming of the rains is a freshet or a gully--disqualified for consideration.

Then there are the less significant, if not less dependable, bodies of water, having their own designations: streams, creeks, and brooks. And runnels, rivulets, and rills: small, smaller, smallest of all.

A canyon is the result of a great contest between the wind and the water: a race, in which the water is winning. The water, rushing ever downward, must wear away the earth in its channel much faster than the wind can sift the earth from the canyon's top ledges and sides. Were the wind to pick up speed or strength, the canyon would quickly become shallow, level, gone. The word canyon is probably derived from an obsolete Spanish word, *callon*, meaning "street."

A wadi is a canyon, usually in Northern Africa, in which the wind is winning--or else, Time has stepped in and called off the contest. In the blank of the wadi, the water has dried up, and the wind is having its way. Only in the rainy season does the water return. Only in the rainy season is it possible to wade in the wadi.

A crater, more than a basin, is an earth-wound. It may be the bowl-shaped depression at the impact of the meteor, in the cone of the volcano, at the base of the geyser, or at the site of a blast. A crater is where the action is.

78

In addition to being a small channel worn away by rainwater, smaller than a ravine and much smaller than a canyon, a gully is also slang for a large knife--like a carving knife or a butcher knife. A cove, characterised in nature only by its concavity--concavity anywhere, land or sea--is also a bloke. And a bay is a dog's bark, a tree, and a color. Bluff is both a steep bank, as of a river, and a nice way to say that someone is a man of few words--a real bluff cove, with his bay gully. Hmmm.

I was distracted by the picture of the ocelot--an American wildcat of medium size with a coat ranging from grey to yellow--when someone who had, no doubt, been patiently waiting for quite a while, asked to step in for a moment.

It had been a nearly unprecedented three hours--just me and the Oxford English Dictionary, with a short intermission for the Encyclopaedia Britannica (excretion-geometry).

"What are you doing?" she asked, seeing my notes.

I am trying to figure out where I have been--and where I am now.

I don't think I've ever seen a hogback, though hogback is a nice, useful word. In addition to denoting "something felt to resemble the back of a hog," it also describes a place where the stratified layers of the earth protrude in slanting layers, creating a small ridge.

Funny.

No matter how I picture it, it doesn't resemble the back of a hog.

Judge's Comments

This essay is written with admirable wit and economy. It shows a true interest both in language and in things, in this instance the things that are literally of this earth. The writer explores how words, as our most ancient maps, arise out of landscape and light our path.

A Letter to Mr. Jerome David Salinger: The original paranoid in reverse

Dear Jerry,

Let's be *completely* honest here. I know you are never going to read this letter. If you were ever even aware of my presence, then *you* would know you were never going to read this letter. The truth is, I'm writing this to fulfill a requirement for a non-fiction essay class (the kind where you sit around in a circle and *critique* everyone else's paper and pick it apart for the *smallest* little mistakes- ones we all know aren't truly mistakes, anyway). I know what you'd say about this paper, though. You'd say I'm no good at it. You'd make me feel like some sort of *phony* and I'd run back to what you'd call my sheltered little Christian home (I know how you look down on us, Jerry. I've read all the books). And I'd decide I don't *want* to be a writer anymore, and I'd decide to go *prostituting* myself in horrid *Hollywood* or something instead. No, I'm not going to Hollywood to write, act, or otherwise. I'm not your average Glass sibling, all right? "Average Glass sibling" is quite the oxymoron, isn't it? Do you at least appreciate that?

I do have a point here, Jerry. I do. Here's the thing: it's going to take a while to get there. Maybe your Buddy inspired me too much. Maybe I've taken on his less
80 *likable* qualities with my use of parentheses and italics. Then again, I *am* trying to write like you to appeal to you. You'd come out and say your purpose, wouldn't you? I always imagined you to be rather straightforward. Ian Hamilton said you put yourself into your characters (Holden Caulfield kicked out of military school? Sound familiar?) and *they* were always straightforward.

I read Hamilton's biography on you, you might like to know. As much as I enjoyed it, I am *relieved* you took him to court. Makes things safer for me. I don't have to worry about people publishing my own non-copyrighted material. They published that girl's diary, you may have seen. (I imagine you do read the news sometimes. Unlike others I know of, I don't imagine you sitting alone in your lookout, perched above a six foot- or is it currently rumored at ten foot?- tall fence, unsent letters strewn about your feet for fear of someone publishing them, no doubt, hiding away from your children and current girlfriend, all of whom are trying to coax you back inside the house. No, I do not think of you in such a light. I choose- and yes, it is very much a choice- to see you as the white haired man in your daughter's graduation photos, laughing loudly at your son's jokes as he worked the new hi-tech whatever camera. That is how I imagine my own Jerry Salinger, as fictional as *my* version of you may be). Yes, they published that girl's diary, the one who died out in Colorado at Columbine High School. I was appalled. The same day I found out, I took my sister aside and said, "Karen, don't *ever* let *anyone* publish *any* of my journals, I don't care *what* happens to me. Seriously, I'd come back from the grave and haunt *every last one of you*."

That's what I said. People shouldn't be publishing things not meant for publication. The letters you sent to those girls in the fifties and sixties have no place on my bookshelf, unless you choose to put them there. Somehow I *don't* think you are going to be sneaking into my dorm room anytime- Swallow Robin 303, in case you're wondering- to put a collection of letters and short fiction between my copies of *Franny & Zooey* and Jacob Riis's book of 1890's photography, or even next to your daughter's memoir. It would be a humorous sight, though, if I woke up to an 80-something year old man in my room, staring at my bookshelves. I would probably laugh. (Is that the normal reaction? I think it would be Seymour's. I always relate better to your male characters than your female ones).

Do you just *hate* it when people have to go *relating* to you all the time? I always heard that sort of thing made you crazy. (I personally believe other things made you crazy. I don't doubt that you're insane, though. Let's be honest again, here. You might be a genius, but you're crazy. Huh. That sounds like the Glass family again). But *really*, Jerry! If you don't want people relating to what you write, don't write such relatable books! I mean, *Catcher*? *Zooey*? *Esme*? Truly, Jerry, you *had* to know people were relating. I guess that's the one way I'll never understand you. I *want* people to relate.

I should probably relate my point to you. I need to ask your permission for something. See, I have this zine (I know. I hate the word as much as you do, I'm sure) that I publish and I absolutely stole the name from you. I thought I was the first one to notice the phrase in Seymour's diary, but skimming the Internet proved me wrong. Still, there's something about your quote. I want to be a reverse paranoiac. "If I'm anything by a clinical name, I'm a kind of paranoiac in reverse. I suspect people of plotting to make me happy." I titled my zine (ugh- I *do* wish I never had to use the word again, but is there anything else to describe it?) *The Reverse Paranoiac*, and although you'll never see this bunch of papers stapled together to form what they call an essay, I thought I could at least ask you *figuratively*. So, can I use it?

I should give you a reason for why I should. I know you probably just *hate* it when people try to interpret what you're trying to say, but I've got to tell you what it meant to me. The first time I really felt reverse paranoia, I was at the annual pre-Homecoming picnic. (Every year, before the big game, the whole school would make their way out to the football field and eat grilled hamburgers and chips out of blue foil-like bags right before student government tried to convince people to join the class competitions. I never volunteered). I was all alone, leaning against the metal fence so that it poked against my back and left marks in my skin, looking out at all of the students doing their collective activities. I felt so strange, as if I was not really even there. It was as if I was watching a motion picture. Jerry, the feeling that I had at that moment- I knew what it was like to be paranoid in reverse. I just knew that the whole event was choreographed for me to observe. The kids playing Red Rover in the distance were running at each other for me. The couples necking on the top of the bleachers were getting red in the face just for me. Even the hundreds of kids trying to

keep the wind from blowing away their trays when they lifted off the hamburgers were only avoiding the wind to entertain me. I wouldn't put the title to it for a few more months, but I know what it was. I knew Seymour Glass right then. I think that means I knew you, too.

It's not just reverse paranoia, either, Jer. It's everything Seymour lived for. It's everything you made him. While I finally *understood* the concept on the football field that day, it was months later when I finally realized why Seymour killed himself. I had never been able to grasp how someone could commit suicide because they were just too *happy*. One insignificant day made it all clear to me- one hardly memorable, inconsequential, average day. I know I had a feeling and then a thought, one nearly indescribable. The closest I've ever coming to expressing it was by saying, "Look, buddy, it was *Seymour*. That's all it was. I *know* why he killed himself." No, I was not plagued suddenly by suicidal thoughts, but one simple idea stopped me as I reached for the remote control (or brush or phone or bottle of water or whatever else it might have been). "I'm so happy I could die." It was no exaggeration. Instead, I was truly so happy that I saw no reason for living anymore. And I have not experienced it since. I suppose only those of us who have known such a feeling can truly understand what it is, anyway. I can only think of four of us: you, me, the fictional Seymour Glass, and Christopher McCandless (who I *still* insist should be referred to as Alexander Supertramp), the doomed boy who walked into the wild that fateful May morning, found a magic bus, ate a moose and some deadly seeds, and never walked out again.

82

That's what this is all about, Jerry. People today, just like when you were still walking aimlessly with the rest of us, they just don't get it. Let me show them what life can be. Now that I've experienced reverse paranoia, I want to let others know about it. I want to form a conspiracy. I want to plot to make them happy- happy to an extreme. Before I go, you know what would make me happy to an extreme? Believe me, this would do it. If you want to show up during my workshop session and back me up here, that'd be great. I know that *Finding Forrester* character wasn't just *made* up. He was inspired by you, wasn't he? You can make this ending as romantic as that one.

For the real conclusion: If I thought I might ever put this in the mailbox, I'd add a thank you right about here, but I don't want to risk sending this to you. It's not that you intimidate me. It goes back to what we talked about earlier- publishing the non-publishable. I know what could happen if I send this to you- it could end up with all the other letters you've been getting lately in volume two of that book, *Letters to JD Salinger*. I just *don't* want that to happen. I think you know what I mean.

The Memory

It was a memory more precious than any other she had. It was worn and faded, frayed at the edges, but even extensive viewing had not distorted it. It had never had the feel of a memory, but of something else more elusive, something akin to a snatch of a dream or a scene from a book read in childhood.

Her memory was of lights and warmth and insubstantial shapes. It had no particulars, nothing real, but only shadows of some reality, and brilliant lights, glowing like the sky on these cold, lonely nights. And warmth like a blanket, a fire, sleep on a dark morning when nothing is awake except the frigid wind.

The owner of this memory was sometimes less sure of her own name than the reality of the memory. This frightened her. For if the memory was false, could she depend on her own existence? But she did not think on such things. She contemplated the memory, examining it endlessly, hoping to extract some clue or revelation from it. There was nothing. She gained nothing from it except a desire to continue forward.

She trudged through the snow, leaving only transient footsteps, small and unremarkable on the white expanse. The wind covered the footsteps, and when she turned back, they were gone.

She was never quite sure how she had arrived at this particular place at this particular moment. She could remember incidents, of course—a table with warm food; a tree behind her back as she watched the snow falling; bitter wind gnawing at her cheeks, her hands; snow melting around her toes; sunrises and sunsets; aching legs, bloodshot eyes; fires so warm she never wanted to leave; leaving; a horizon in the distance that never neared.

But now it was night. Half her life was night. Snowflakes drifted down like bits of clouds. The wind had fallen asleep, buried beneath feet of snow and ice. It would rise again tomorrow, colder than ever. The land spread before her without distinction, and the blankness shone with light.

Stars peered from the sky, each one crisp and clear, a point so bright and precise that it must be newly born. Each was pure, unsullied, like the snow beneath her feet—and distant. The snow sparkled like the stars, but that was because it was the stuff of stars. Fallen stars.

She stopped, though she knew she should not. If she stopped, she might never begin again. She stood still, bundled thickly against the cold. Her true form was hid by those things necessary for survival in this harsh world. She uncovered her face and took a deep, burning breath.

Her eyes were a light blue, the shade of snow at gray dawns. Spots of red appeared on her cheeks, at the tip of her nose. She pulled off her gloves and placed her pale hands against her cheeks. The warmth felt good, comforting, even if it was her own, even if she could never win this battle against the chill herself.

She realized again how empty the night was. She turned, looking about her anxiously, but no one was there. She hoped, somehow and always, that someone would come and carry her away, so she could stop trudging, so that his body might warm her.

She slipped her gloves on and raised her head to the sky. That was the real reason she had stopped. Not to look for things she would not find-though even that had some part in it, she admitted to herself-but to look at what she knew she would find.

Greens and reds and blues and golds lapped slowly against stars like ocean waves, a pool of rainbows in the distant sky, near the horizon. Waves spread from the center slowly, slowly outward, and crashed against the blackness of the night. It was a mesmerizing sight and inexplicable. Frightening.

She didn't know why, but whenever she watched the lights above, her heart beat faster and her hands began to sweat. She could not look for long. She wanted to turn away and run. She felt small, a single flake among the winter of the world; she would melt if she looked too long.

84

But she always looked. The colors were strange, celestial, too bright and too slow. Nothing in the world equaled them. When there was no moon, the snow mirrored the colors in pale reflections, and she could watch these for hours. It was distilled; she could almost grasp it when it sparkled in the snow. Above, the sight was terrible. Below, shielded by the vast distances of sky, it was beautiful.

Her eyes snapped from the colors to the ground. She stood for a long time staring at the snow. Her limbs grew cold. She could no longer feel her face. Slowly, as if waking, she covered her face and took a step.

After one step, the others came as a matter of course

One day she found herself in a village of lumpy white buildings. The buildings had been spotless wooden boxes once, but snow covered everything eventually. The villagers tired of clearing it away. They let it remain wherever it did not interfere too directly with life.

She entered the inn. There were few enough travelers wherever she went, but every village had an inn. The guest rooms were an excuse for a common room; the villagers needed somewhere to gather, somewhere with a fire to warm them and company to enjoy the warmth with them.

She pulled a chair near the fire and sat. Slowly, one article at a time, she removed her protective clothing. First came the mask, then the gloves, then the boots. The hood, the scarf, the outer coat, the outer pants, the inner coat. She let her hair

down and shook her head violently to untangle it. Snow and ice flew from her. A puddle formed on the floor.

She could feel warm air, as she could seldom. She felt it in her throat when she inhaled. There was a draft somewhere, but she loved it; it made the warmth sweeter, fiercer.

"One of life's great pleasures."

She turned her head to find a man looking at her from a nearby table. He had a thick beard and dark eyes. He had neither food nor drink at his table, nothing to show why he sat there. She thought that perhaps he liked the fire as she did. She nodded in reply to his statement and turned back to watch the flames.

He spoke again soon after, in a tone of understanding. "You heading to the Top of the World?"

She watched the flames, the strange dance of a force that had no real substance, but moved in ways she thought she should understand. Like music, just as formless and just as powerful.

"I guess that's where I'm heading," she answered. "Unless something changes." She glanced at him. "How did you know?"

"You're not the only one going that way."

She chewed her upper lip. She had not known that there were others, but it did not surprise her. It seemed natural. "What's there? Do you know?"

He chuckled. "If I knew, I probably wouldn't go. It's the mystery that intrigues me. Oh, sure, there are those who go simply to prove there's nothing there and those who go because they see everyone else going and those who go because it's their 'destiny,' but in the end, does it really matter why we go? It's a challenge to get there, so it must be worth doing. It's a matter of pride." 85

She did not say anything immediately. She did not say that it was her destiny, because she would never have used that word, but that was the idea of it. She thought of it as her fulfillment when she could think of it in words at all. What she said was: "I've never met anyone else. Why doesn't everyone want to go?"

He leaned forward. "What is it like traveling?"

"Cold, so cold you want to give in to it. Cold and lonely. Miserable, but..." She was going to add beautiful and necessary, joyful and rich in expectation, silent-sometimes in terror and sometimes in peace-but he did not want to hear such things. He had heard what he asked for.

"Exactly. Most people can't handle it. They give up and settle down. Which is good, because then you and I get to rest and sit by their fire."

She nodded again. He said nothing else, and she watched the fire and its undulating, restless motions. Snow sparkled, but fire blazed. It was a tamed star, a boxed dream, but still, for all she tried, she could not understand it.

The man at the inn was right. The further she traveled, the more travelers

she saw on the same path. She still traveled alone, but she sometimes saw others in the distance, trudging along. Sometimes there were two or three together, but they never seemed to move quickly. She saw them arguing with one another many times. The Top of the World, for its self-evident locality, was not easy to find.

In the Last Village-a sign proudly proclaimed the name because "last" gave the village a distinction over every other collection of houses in the world-she first experienced despair. There were other men there who said that no one could reach the Top of the World, that they had tried and failed, that better men than they had tried and failed-that all who tried had failed.

"You don't know that!"

"No one like me has ever tried."

"You're lying. You don't want us to reach the Top. You're too scared to try yourself."

"I've traveled for thirty years. Nothing's stopping me."

She listened to the protests, to the confidence of the voices, but inside she felt a hole. It was trying to consume her memory, the only memory she believed was intrinsically hers, and when she grasped for it, it slipped from her fingers, heavy, bulky, shapeless. She remained silent in a room full of words and contemplated, for the first time, failure.

86

The Last Village was many days from the Top of the World, and these days were much colder than any that had come before. It snowed fiercely, and no matter how securely she dressed, snow forced its way into cracks and cold wind slithered through layers of clothes to bite the skin. She could see neither sun nor star. Day was a gray version of night.

She saw no one as she walked unceasingly forward. She could not see her path, but she knew she was following it. She thought it was the right path. She hoped it was. She had no way to tell. She could only continue forward the way she had chosen before the snow had overtaken her vision.

The cold-unbearable if she stopped-affected her memory. Its lights seemed dimmer, its warmth cooler, and she began to doubt that she had ever possessed such a memory. It must be an illusion, a foolish dream, a tale she had heard once upon a time. She dare not stop, for she would die.

She considered turning back. She could see nothing ahead. No one had ever made it to the Top of the World. She knew that. There was fire in the Last Village, a room and a bed.

She continued forward. She longed for the past, but her feet were moving for reasons she could no longer remember; she feared to stop them now.

The snow ceased.

She passed through the snow as a final barrier. Behind her, it blew with the intensity of a cyclone, but here the air was still. She found herself in a cylinder of calmness and her feet were on a rising slope. She was very near the Top. She climbed the last few steps and found herself on a plateau.

She looked up. The sky held neither the black of night nor the gray-blue of day. The ocean of colors floated above her. It consumed the whole sky. The colors felt closer than they ever had, but she knew she could never reach them. Miles of bitter air separated her.

It was unearthly cold. Flakes of ice dropped from her breath.

Her eyes caught something she had never seen, a ribbon of gold that stretched from the center of the colors down...down...down... Her eyes followed the ribbon, followed it down miles and ages of emptiness until it reached the ground. There, in the center of the plateau, stood a ladder.

She rushed toward it with energy she did not have. She stumbled through the dusty snow, pushing through weak knees and a twisted ankle. The ladder was within her reach when she first noticed she was not along.

It was a man. He gripped a rung in gloved hands; his feet were still on the ground. She could not see his face through his mask. No skin was visible except for the circle of his eyes, but she sensed that every muscle was tensed, that his flesh was taut in strain.

She watched him and time passed. He did not move. He never ascended a single rung. He stood there in silent agony. 87

Then he threw himself suddenly away from the ladder and landed on his back in a puff of snow and with a thud. She expected silence, as if he were dead, but there was not silence, but only the sound of weeping. She knelt beside him, unable to give words to any of her questions or emotions.

"It's impossible," he muttered. Not to her, not to anyone, but to himself. His tears froze to his face in small pellets. "I hate it, I hate it, I hate it, I hate it!" This last was a scream; it reverberated across the plateau and echoed in diminishing parodies of his anger.

"Why didn't you go up?"

"The one who came before me said it could be done. Said he had tried everything." The man was raving, but she listened. "He said he had been here for days. Said the ones before him told him the same he was telling me. Said...didn't matter what he said. I didn't listen, did I? I woke one morning and found him dead. Killed himself. Couldn't bear the failure. I had to bury him. That was yesterday...yesterday...I think it was yesterday. All the days are the same. All are just today. I'll never get there. Never. Never."

She crawled away from the man cautiously, but her eyes remained on him. The words clung to the despair she had been hiding from herself. Her back touched something solid...and warm. She turned and found the ladder. It shone softly in the light, but always its own color, reflecting none of the colors above.

She leaned heavily against it. The warmth seeped through her many layers to the skin. It was fiercely pleasant. The cold gnawed at her skin, even beneath her clothes, and this warmth threatened to consume her. The two struggled within her. Her limbs felt heavy and weary. Her insides churned. Her mind was a mass of indecision concerning a question she did not know.

Within a few minutes, she was asleep.

Her hands gripped the rung and she pulled. Her hands burned. She gritted her teeth in pain and exertion. Her muscles trembled violently. She could not pull herself up; she was too heavy. She felt she had to pull the ground beneath her feet as well—the ground here and everywhere; the whole world must come up the ladder with her, but she could not carry it. Her shoulders were too narrow, her frame too small.

She tried to jump up the ladder. If she could get her feet off the ground, if she could support herself on the ladder alone... But the ladder was too slick. Her feet slid from the rungs and her hands could not hold her. The gold color was from the oil, she thought. The ladder had been anointed so that none could scale it.

88

She studied the ladder. She knew it was useless. The ladder went on forever. There was no end to it, none that any human could reach. Her memory...she must have been thrown down, like the snow, to be blown about, buried under layers of others like her, unique, yet indistinguishable.

She stood before the ladder, an arm's length away, and began to remove her protective clothing, piece by piece. She could barely make her hands unfasten and unbutton the other articles. She would warm them on the ladder, then continue briefly. It took a long time. She continued removing clothing after the outer, protective pieces.

She had never been so cold. Since birth, she had never been naked in the cold.

She clung to the ladder. She knew she could not climb it even now. She was still too heavy. She tried to will her arms to pull, her legs to push, but they would not respond; they listened instead with a deeper will, one that had surrendered but refused to despair.

She was alone and only the warmth of the ladder spreading throughout her body kept her alive. She tumbled into uneasy dreams from time to time.

Then she looked up the length of the ladder, and the rungs ran together like a walkway of gold. The ripples in the sky above opened like doors. She trembled and averted her eyes. "My name...", she whispered, trying to remember what it was. "My name is Falle. I have searched my whole life for a memory I never knew. I've wanted

to forget it. I've wanted to take pleasure in the things I saw others enjoying. I've wanted the answers to come quickly and easily. I want it to come now, by my own doing, by my own pain and suffering. I'd climb every rung of a thousand ladders like this if I could. But I can't. I can't. I can't."

There was silence. She fought the despair within her. It told her to leave. She could build herself a house; inside she would have a fire that would never dim or cool. It would not be her memory, but it would be close enough.

"I've found it," she told herself through gritted teeth. "I've found it."

Her tears froze to her cheeks.

"It can't be done," an old man in the Last Village said. HE said it every night. He had tried when he was a boy, and he derived a perverse pleasure in retelling his failure. "I tried for days. Can't be done. No one ever has."

A tough man nearby looked at them. His eyes were flat and unfocused. He had been drunk and silent all night. "I saw her do it," he said. He spoke to his cup. "What?" The room became silent.

"I said I saw her do it!" he yelled. "Went straight up. Wasn't even trying." He noticed everyone watching him and turned around in his chair like a dog looking for its tail. "She did! Flew up. Wasn't trying or nothing. Id' say she was pulled up, though I couldn't see anyone else. She was laughing. Like she was a child on her daddy's back. I saw her, I did." 89

The room lost interest. They all knew he was drunk. He had just returned from failing, as did everyone-except those who killed themselves. "It's impossible," the old man repeated firmly. "Just you go and try. Ain't a person in the world can pull himself up that ladder. Don't know why you would want to. Nothing up there but sky and those awful colors. Nothing at all."

The drunk looked into his empty cup. He had not stopped talking; he continued to mutter to himself. "She was laughing. Laughing like it was the end of the world and she was glad of it. And she shouted something. Crazy as anything.

"'I remember.' That was it I think. 'I remember,' she said. 'It's home, it's home.'"

Worried About Your Relationship? Five flags to Look for

MURPHY'S LAW: "Whatever can go wrong, will, and it will happen to me."

THE LAW OF ENTROPY: "Everything goes to disorder."

THE LAW OF COLLEGE DATING: "If you are twenty or older, you should marry whoever you're dating. Now."

Murphy's law, the law of entropy, and the law of college dating-the three maxims that govern the universe. Or so we're led to believe. Allow me to present evidence to the contrary.

I speak from experience. Everyone (but me) saw it coming. In fact, my friends had converted their Y2K bunkers into mysterious havens for endless pounds of chocolate bars and ice cream. Immediately upon finding the catastrophic results of applying law #3 to dating relationships, my friends welcomed me into their converted bunkers. They are, at present, cleaned out.

Having devoted myself to much study-and ice cream-I have discovered the five red flags that should have caught my attention.

90

Flag #1: Never date someone born on September 11 or any other day known for disaster. Who does that? It's frightening enough to date someone who shares a birthday with the Unabomber or your scary first grade teacher. But if any other national disaster that kills more than a thousand people should occur on your significant other's birthday, flee for your life. It simply can't be saved.

Flag #2: Don't date someone who doesn't like soup. It just isn't normal. Everyone should like soup. What will you do when you're sick and your significant other has to take care of you? And, for the record, what happens on those cold winter days? Most people would cuddle by the fireplace with their sweetheart and enjoy a nice, steaming cup of soup. But you, my friend, would have to warm your hands over the fire with your soup-hating lover and a big bowl of beans.

Flag #3: Last names are everything. It's often the butt of men's cruel jokes, but it truly is important for the woman to see what her first name sounds like with his last name. Of course, it's widely known that women do this anyway with every man they meet, but it's entirely justified. The reason for this is simple. If the result is something like Hope Sinks or Patty Sausage, you cannot pursue this relationship. Unless he agrees to change his last name, get as far away as possible.

Flag #4: Be careful with your vehicles. Let's be hypothetical for a moment. Imagine yourself completely falling for a certain man. Imagine that you desperately want to bond with his older sister. Imagine yourself accidentally backing into her care. Yeah, don't do that. Post-dented, a car's value can't be maintained until 97.5% of the car is replaced. Pay attention to that. God created literary rules such as symbolism and foreshadowing for a reason.

Flag #5: Never date someone who didn't have to be punished as a child. Sweet, yes. And you may someday produce perfect children. Right. It won't be until after you have kids that he will reveal to you the real culprit behind all the forest fires since 1982. The cuter the baby, the more secretly mischievous the kid, and the more villainous the adult. Find someone who was just as ornery as the rest of us normal people.

Of course he's a prince. But, dear friends, I said that too, and I've been left to the horrible fate of graduating without a ring. So, I know it's tragic now, but if you're in a relationship with a man who falls into one of these fateful categories, get rid of him. Otherwise, you're destined to a heartbreak which would send you spiraling into the deep abyss of all the ice cream and chocolate your friends are currently stocking up. They can certainly see it coming, anyway.

July 20

The hospital scene looked familiar, like something I'd seen on *ER* late on a Thursday evening. All of the elements were in place; the big glass doors, a few spare wheelchairs sitting around, even the "no cell phones" sign was placed fittingly on the entrance door. But this time I wasn't sitting comfortably on the couch in my basement; this was the real thing.

I'd known Jake for over a year. His ever-present toothy grin and immature laugh were always sure signs that Jake was near. Jake stood over six feet tall, his dusty blonde hair often hidden beneath a worn baseball cap. With his athletic yet boyish build, Jake was sometimes a bit of an awkward sight, but nevertheless, he was loved by his peers. On that particular Wednesday afternoon a group of friends from my church met at the lake for a day full of cookouts, skiing, and sunburns.

92 I'd never really been in an emergency room. I was scared of what Jake looked like, afraid I'd see something I couldn't handle. My eyes met those of Natalie's older brother, Eric, who was just as frightened as I was. Eric stood with his arms crossed loosely across his chest, his fingers tapping nervously on his upper arm. Eric's eyes moved quickly throughout the brightly lit room. As our eyes met, he tried to send me comfort by giving me a weary smile

It was a perfect day for the lake. Natalie and I rode there together in my baby blue, beat up, 1983 mercury marquee. She wore an old tee-shirt with a pair of cut off shorts; perfect attire for a lake day. While Natalie was a year younger than me, she stood almost six inches taller than I. On the ride to the lake, we discussed topics that normal sixteen and seventeen-year old girls often do. She mentioned that she and her boyfriend Jake had resolved a fight late last night and vowed to start over in their relationship. Natalie smiled as the name Jake escaped her lips. I was excited to be bonding with Natalie. Her family had taken mine under their wing as we recently started attending the church they were involved in. Between my friendship with her brother and my growing closeness with Natalie, I knew Natalie and Eric's family was one that I would grow to love.

Natalie was the first to walk through the double doors and get past the lobby. My heart raced. I looked to Eric for comfort, encouragement... anything. That is when I heard Natalie's voice. She wasn't speaking or even crying; Natalie screamed. I heard her scream through the doors. What was back there?

After nearly a forty minute drive, we arrived at the lake. Natalie was immediately greeted by Jake. He had been playing basketball with the guys who he quickly walked away from in order to meet his girlfriend. Dressed only in his red swim trunks and a smile, he took Natalie in his arms. She smiled too.

It was perfect outside. The sun glistened off the glass-like lake. A slight

breeze kept us cool despite the sun beating down. Lunch had been prepared and prayer had been said. The majority of us sat packed on a large wrap-around couch as we ate our lunches in the living room. Others sat on barstools in the nearby kitchen, feet dangling and elbows on the counter. Past the sliding glass door in the kitchen was the remainder of our group eating outside. The porch directly off the house faced the calming lake and was surrounded by friendly neighbors on both sides, each lucky enough to own equally cozy living environments. While sitting in the living room with our bathing suits and towels on, Natalie shot me one of those, "I need to talk to you" looks and I responded with a smile to contain her most recent crisis.

After lunch, Natalie and I made our way through the kitchen and slid open the door. Upon stepping onto the porch outside, I noticed the boys who were playing a competitive game of euchre to my left. Natalie was immediately distracted by the youth pastor's two young daughters playing croquet in the yard and proceeded to join without hesitation. I made my way off the porch and through the grassy yard towards the lake. A few girls had been swimming since they finished lunch when I decided to join them for a dip in the lake. After some time, a girl with a concerned look on her face, approached us and said, "Do you know where Jake is?" We all shook our heads. Natalie had already taken notice of the upcoming situation and made her way back through the door and into the kitchen to find out exactly what was happening.

"No one can find him and someone said he was sick earlier," finished the girl who was bringing us news about Jake.

I noticed movement in the house. Suddenly our previously scattered group seemed to be coming together in a somewhat panicked manner; people were loud and moving fast in the entrance of the house, I could just barely see it from my position in the water. I walked towards the house. After drying off and wrapping myself tightly in a striped towel, I slid open the glass door only to be immediately broken of the care-free attitude the lake had given me. I walked quickly until I reached the area where I met everyone huddled in front of the hallway that met between the kitchen and the living room.

Eric and I sat in the lobby. I was too afraid to see what had inspired Natalie's horrifying scream. I rested my elbows on Eric's knee and buried my head into my hands. I wanted to know what was going on behind those doors and if Jake was okay, but I was so afraid of what I did not know.

Jake's mom slipped weakly through the doors into the lobby, her face lost and eyes glazed over. She met her sister, Jake's aunt, who was walking towards his mom in the corridor of the emergency room.

"He's gone," Jake's mom said in almost a whisper. I heard it again, "he's gone." The once perky, encouraging woman collapsed in her sister's arms as I felt the tears burn in my eyes. One blink was all it took for the tears to fall and fall and fall. I let my head sink again into my hands and started to cry silently. Eric put one arm around me, as I rested completely on him, and brought his remaining hand to his eyes

to wipe away the constant tears that were now flowing.

I immediately searched out Natalie from the group of people surrounding the hallway entrance. As I looked down the hallway I noticed a few others standing in front of the bathroom door to the left. Whatever was causing this commotion had some relation to something behind the bathroom door. Natalie was standing with the larger group in front of the hallway entrance; her highlighted, short hair was still damp from a dip in the water earlier that afternoon.

"What's going on?" I asked, confused from the chaos in the hallway.

"It's Jake," she said, her face was struck with some emotion that I wasn't exactly sure of yet. "He's been in the bathroom for awhile and he's not responding to anyone. No one knows how long he's been in there, and the door's locked. They can't get it open." She spoke fast as her eyebrows hinted upward with confusion and wonder. She bit her bottom lip with nervousness.

Jake's closest friends try to coerce him out of the bathroom.

"Jake, open up, it's not funny anymore," one of them demanded.

No one was sure if he was kidding around or if something was truly wrong. Finally, someone decided to take action and pick the lock. If this was a joke, Jake had taken it too far.

94 "Mandii, will I ever see my boyfriend again?" Natalie asked me, her eyes stayed locked on the door that her boyfriend lay behind. I reassured her that everything would turn out for the best. Although I was completely unsure of what had happened to Jake behind that bathroom door, I knew everything would be okay.

Three guys worked against the clock to try and break down the door. The boys tried kicking the door in, picking the lock, and powering the door down with their strength. Finally their tactics paid off as the door was broken down. By this time, everyone who was at the lake house had gathered at the entrance to the hallway. All twenty-two of us held our breaths in fearful anticipation to find out Jake's state. Two people immediately rushed into the room. Jake was lying on the floor, face-down, his skin discolored. Two of his friends turned him over and started doing CPR.

"One.... Two.... Three...." I heard the poundings on Jake's chest. Tears started to build in my eyes and I noticed others suffering from the same condition. I grabbed Natalie's hand as we headed up the stairs to the right of the living room. I thought it would be best for her to get away from the frightening scene that was taking place. Within moments, seconds, her focus had been transformed and she had been faced with an issue that no sixteen-year-old should ever have to deal with.

"Will I ever see my boyfriend again?" questioned Natalie again.

"We're in a fight. I never said I was sorry," Natalie blurted out. "Jake wanted me to spend time with him today, but I was playing with the kids. I had no idea, I mean, I didn't think this was going to...."

After I heard Jake's mom utter the devastating news, I looked at Eric. We both stood up and made our way past the double doors. Waiting past the doors were Natalie's parents, relatives of Jake, and close friends of the family. Everyone sat silent

in shock. Some people cried while others held hands with the person next to them. A few relatives prayed, although I had no idea what you could possibly pray for in a situation like this. I felt like I had lost my faith in God. How could God take a seventeen-year-old boy who had never even seen his senior year of high school? I didn't understand.

After what seemed like hours, the ambulance lights could be seen from the house. A few of us ran outside to let the driver know exactly where we were. Natalie stuck close by my side and I kept trying to find encouraging words.

"He'll make it Natalie. It's going to be ok. Keep praying. Everything is going to be ok." I honestly believed that Jake would be "just fine". I couldn't grasp death. Seventeen-year-olds aren't supposed to die.

Time passed and soon a stretcher holding Jake was carried out to the flashing red vehicle. I was reminded of being a young girl and watching the horror movie, *Pet Cemetery*. I remember putting my hands over my eyes, peeking between my fingers to try and get a slight glimpse of what was taking place on the screen. Just like when I was a child, I didn't want to look because I knew it would horrify me; I looked anyway. I couldn't see Jake. He had an oxygen mask of some sort over his mouth and was covered by a blanket from the feet up to his waist.

The hospital was a blur. Jake's closest friends sat huddled in the corner of the room, some with eyes shut, some crying, others sitting alert and uncomfortable, trying to make sense of it all. Natalie sat and appeared to be deep in thought as her fingers ran over Jake's hat that was left at the lake. Occasionally she brought the hat to her nose; it still smelled of Jake's cologne.

With a bit of hesitation I slowly asked, "What happened to him in the bathroom?" Not directing my words towards anyone in particular. At this point, everyone's eyes looked around the room, hoping for some explanation of what had happened.

"He had been complaining to someone earlier that his heart was beating fast and that his chest hurt," started Zeb, one of the people who attempted to do CPR to resuscitate Jake. "When we found him in the bathroom, he was already gone. His heart... I guess it just stopped," finished Zeb.

Jake knew that he had struggled with asthma since he was a little boy. Yet at seventeen, everyone thought that Jake had it controlled. It hadn't been a serious issue in years, until now.

As the ambulance took Jake to the medical center, nearly thirty minutes away, Eric, Natalie and I followed in Eric's car. Silence filled the vehicle, even the radio had been turned off. I looked at the speedometer, fifty-five miles per hour exactly. Why wasn't Eric driving faster? The anticipation of finding out Jake's condition was making my heart pound in my chest. I went over the day in my head, almost positive that Natalie and Eric were doing the same.

"What was the last thing Jake said to me?" I silently wondered.

Finally we arrived at the hospital. Eric and I dropped Natalie off at the entrance as we went and parked the car. Natalie unbuckled her seatbelt and I stepped

out of the two-doored vehicle to let her out. Her long legs moved rapidly as she ran towards the entrance. The automatic doors opened and Natalie continued in. After parking the car, Eric and I joined Natalie in the lobby of the emergency room, fearfully anticipating what would happen next.

Sometimes I still hear the rythmatic poundings on Jake's chest that were supposed to bring him back to life. If I close my eyes and think hard enough, I can still hear Zeb's voice forcefully coaching, "1.....2.....3" as another person pushed hard to make Jake's heart pump again. These are not the memories that I hold close. I remember Jake's constant laughter, his passion for sports, friends and more importantly, his passion for God. I remember his nickname of "divot," because Jake so often gouged huge holes in the ground when he went golfing. I remember his dream of becoming a pilot, or an engineer and attending a Big Ten school. I remember Jake for the person he was, and hold dear positive memories that will never be forgotten.

222 Oak Park Ave.

To E. Miller Hemingway

One hundred years after your birth (thirty-eight years after your death) I spent my summer days in your boyhood home. No, not the one your father built, or the small house by the public library, but the one your grandfather, Ernest Hall, owned; the house where you saw your first day and night and maybe heard your first bell toll.

It sits in probably much the same way you remember it. The front porch, where your father blew his horn to announce your birth, has been restored to match that day. The broad Victorian door has the same frosted glass window. Now a new dead bolt keeps out any would-be grave robbers. Security goes beyond the dead bolt including a multi-hundred dollar alarm system. The current owners wish to take no chances that someone may wish to sneak out your christening gown or other nada. Greeting visitors in the foyer is, not only the assorted winged backed chairs and in table, a tour guide like myself (I prefer the term docent). Under panes of glass on tables lie fading newspaper clippings of the house. Under another panes of glass are pictures of the house in various stages of its evolution.

By the way, after you left families like your own lived in the house. Around 1950, I'm sure before you won the Nobel, the house found itself split into apartments. The only remnant from these years is the psychedelic wallpaper in the attic. In the mid-70s a group of Oak Park businessmen and women, and wannabe philanthropists, formed a foundation, The Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park, to buy the house. Their picture can be seen pressed under that first pane of glass. 97

I say this because you might find it of interest, the information usually doesn't make the tour. I started the tour off by letting everyone know the house actually belonged to your maternal grandfather and namesake Ernest Hall. Unfortunately the house only holds two pictures of your old grandfather, one of him in his Civil War uniform. The delicate Victorian decor reflects more your mother's touch than a soldier's home. The other picture is of an aged Ernest Hall. The upstanding gentlemen stands hunched over and cane assisted. Because of advanced skin disease he wears loose, baggy clothes not touching the sensitive epidermis. Your older sister and you stand solemn faced on either side careful to hold Grandpa's hands without hurting. You were only two or three.

While on the subject of grandparents I point across the street showing the crowd where your paternal grandparents lived, the house is no longer standing. If the crowd looks particularly ignorant I tell them Scott Fitzgerald, the guy that wrote that Gatsby book to them, lived across the street too. These groups never question the numinous authority of the tour guide. A picture of Grandpa Hemingway in his Civil

War uniform hangs next to Ernest Hall. Whatever fourth-rate scholar who wrote the docent spiel credits your views on war more to the stories you heard from you grandfather's growing up than your own war experiences.

I know you left the Oak Park Ave. house at only five years old, but maybe you still remember the high ceilinged sitting room with its window seat. Pictures of your mother, as she did in her life, dominate the room. Often I hear other docents tell how lucrative your mother's voice lessons became. It might bring up issues all over again for you to hear her called the breadwinner over your submissive father.

Over in the corner, as if the Victorian parlor has not alienated itself enough from America's great Modern novelist, stands a cello, like the one you played. The cello never carried the same importance or romance for you as say fishing or bullfighting. No mention of the room tells about your boyhood love for boxing, but center stage sits that cello. Once I told a group, a group that I perceived as fairly educated, that you had about as much use for the cello as Harry Morgan did with a left-handed glove. Silence. Well, I imagine you would have laughed.

Again under a pain of glass are pictures of you in infancy. Under one picture of you in a particularly lacy gown reads a heading about how your mother dressed you as a girl. Crowds always laugh at the story. I don't. I don't tell it either. The story isn't even credible. At six months should you have been wearing pants and a tie, no, babies wear gowns.

98

Into the dining room and further stamping the house as the incubator and cradled of your career. Here, according to whatever big Swede gummed up the line between rumor and fact in the docent's manual, is where your storytelling began. Grandfather Ernest Hall had a repertoire of cartoon like characters that went on a new adventure every morning over the breakfast table. I often hear described that at the table listening to grandfather's prayers you gained a religious nada.

Do not let it seem Ernest Hall is portrayed as a sole influence, though in those first five years of your life he held a favorite spot, only competition among grandfather's consisting of Grandpa Hemingway marching in the front yard wearing his navy Civil War uniform until one day when his brains are found spilled in the backyard. Uncle Tylee, whose room was across from the maid's quarters, is still on the tour. No his affairs with the consistently changing maids, due to the need for pregnancies or abortions, is not mentioned. The more PG Uncle Tylee is presented: the beloved uncle, brother, and son who traveled all over the world, including the Far East, for business and occasionally returning to the states to tell his nieces and nephews about the far off world. These stories, not your unhappiness with Illinois, are held responsible for your later lavish trips.

The last room of the downstairs tour is the kitchen. Seeing how you grew up with maids and cooks I have probably spent more time giving lectures in this room than you did your first five years. Pressed under the inevitable pain of glass is a picture of four year-old Papa up in Michigan wearing his straw hat and holding a fly rod, with feet wading like islands in a stream.

I remember one summer, when circling Lake Michigan, passing by Walloon Lake. Signs pointed the way all through Petoskey to THE BOYHOOD HOME OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY. Now those fourth rate scholars and fifth rate bait fishermen have emptied the lake trying to relive apart of your life. Any influence or presence of the native people has passed with the rugged homes of Illinois doctors and their wives. Each acre around Walloon Lake is littered with the Boyhood Snow Cone Stand of Hemingway and Papa's Fudge Shop.

So to were each rail of the Oak Park home's banisters sold in a fundraiser. Own a part of Ernest Hemingway's childhood, just \$100 a rail, the slogan went. I'm sure to leave this part out as groups ascend to the second floor.

First upstairs is your father's room. Photographs, Dr. Hemingway enjoyed amateur photography I'll say, hang on the wall and sit on shelves. The favorite picture is of a young Dr. Hemingway examining a cadaver. Thanks to your father there exists a wealth pictures of you in your youth, along with the other five children. No one ever mentions it, I sweep it under the rug, but a notable lack of pictures of Grace, your mother, exists. She appears in family pictures but absent elsewhere.

She stays mostly absent from the upstairs tour as well. Her room is white, nothing of interest, and dim. It is that room that saw you come into the world.

Ernest Hall's room lets in a flood of sunshine through the picture windows. The windows face east and just as in your youth the sun also rises through them. The typical finery of the Victorian gentleman litters the room: thin rimmed reading glasses, wide suspenders, a waist coat, and the King James Bible. A rocking chair by the fireplace makes the room look more Norman Rockwell than Santiago.

After Uncle Tylee's room and the maids' quarters groups visit the nursery. It is as pale and drab as your mother's room. The spiel goes, this is where that storytelling imagination of Ernest Hemingway was fostered for the first five years. No toys occupy the floor or shelves; no white elephants border the wall. The room is plain.

Now for you I leave one last part, for tour groups it comes sooner, but this news is left last for you. If this trip to your first house has not left enough of a bad taste in your mouth here's the kicker. A wannabe (he's a self-proclaimed non-wannabe) Hemingway writes in your grandfather's attic: William Elliot(t), I guess either he or the publishers are still undecided which spelling should appear on his book covers, Hazelgrove. He writes wordy descriptions and plots that twist more unexplainably than unexpectedly. He reminds me of Cohn from *The Sun Also Rises*, enough said.

After all the summer was over I guess all I had to show was a used up train pass (\$14.95) and a copy of *The Fifth Column* (\$8.99). That money would have been better spent on tickets at Wrigley Field. We got one heck of a right fielder.

Ergonomics

Chest up, chin down. Tilt your pelvis- brace with your abdominals. Do your exercises.

I met Yvette Santangelo on June 2, 2002.

Just home from my second semester at college, I had come to work for my dad for the summer. He ran a small physical therapy clinic in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia home to the second biggest mall in the country. The town was also the crossroads of three major highways. Busy east coast life; buildings and engine exhaust. The drive from my mom's house in West Chester took only half an hour, as long as I was wise enough to avoid rush hour.

100 The contrast of the hurried, concrete surroundings to my dad's small, plain office was very welcome. Simple enough, the office's clean walls were decorated with only one poster titled "The Amazing Back," exposing red muscles, pale yellow tendons and white bones; the numbered key at the bottom of the poster named each part along the spine. The cool air coming from the vents also made the room an inviting alternative to the sweltering outside. A stress-relieving mini-fountain, like the ones you could buy at IKEA for \$16.99, completed the office's decorations. I conveniently situated this on my desk which rested near the door, its right side butted up against the wall the door was laid in. Patients entering the office to my right stopped in with me to sign in. My dad's desk sat behind mine, usually strewn with forms and progress notes. The wall opposite to where my desk rested had been made into a giant mirror stretching all the way to the left wall, giving the illusion that the room was twice its real size. An exercise gym with a treadmill, weights, and a Total Gym filled up the rest of the room to my left. A large window along the left wall, opposite the door, overlooked homes and trees--thankfully turned the other way from the giant mall. The office sat peacefully apart from King of Prussia's ceaseless hurriedness. Two examination rooms were in the back, each containing a window, a storage closet, where the hot packs were kept, and a water cooler completed the operation.

I was soon to learn what it meant to be a physical therapy assistant. Since our office sat next to a clinic of spine specialists, headed up by a Dr. Weinstein, most of our patients were back patients. We taught people to walk straighter: chest up, chin down. We worked to strengthen abdominals, stretch unwilling hamstrings, and mobilize sacroiliac joints. All to fix their backs. All to reduce pain. Besides all this, along with paper pushing and learning to navigate through the insurance gymnasium, I spent

the rest of my time with people.

Each patient would lay down in an examination room before starting their program. I prepared the hot packs for them to lie on, taking the steaming pads out of the 160 degree water container in the closet. Wrapped with a hot pack cover and a towel, the packs made up a comfortably warm bed for the patients which loosened their muscles and helped them to relax. Since each patient laid down for twenty minutes we would often talk. These twenty minute sessions became my favorite thing about work and I soon saw how therapy would not be limited to just physical wellness; our physical "therapizing," as I called it, would involve more than spines. Each patient had a different physical ailment--each a different reason for getting better, or for staying sick. But each also suffered ailments of the spirit, crippled under emotional weight. I would not only be trying to help our patients physically, but I would also be trying to help them walk straighter inwardly, to heal invisible pain. I would soon find out what kind of people people really were, and what parts of their lives I would be allowed to enter. And I would soon ask the question, who will therapize the therapist?

Yvette walked in five minutes late, as would turn out to be usual. "Oh, hi honey," she said and signed in. I could see that she was fairly young, in her late twenties, and that she had light brown curly hair. She wore a professional looking skirt suit but was obviously not the stereotypical nerdy businesswoman who would prefer sitting behind her desk to going out dancing. Yvette, in fact, loved to dance. My dad introduced me and explained that I would be working there for the summer as his physical therapy assistant. I said "hello" and shook her hand, smiling. Yvette smiled too and I saw quickly that she had very soft brown eyes and a genuine face. I could see all these things about her in one minute--that she was young, energetic, hurried, sincere. "What did she see in me?" I thought. "What image is reflected in her eyes?"

101

At hearing that I was my dad's son she smiled again and said, "Aw, that's nice." She went into one of the exam rooms to change and I got a hot pack ready from the closet for her to lie on. When she opened the door she was wearing a pink sweat-shirt with a wide collar. I went in and set up her hot pack on the examination table. She laid down with a sigh and said, "Thanks, honey."

"Man, it's been a long day," she said and made herself comfortable.

"Yeah, it's really hot outside," I added.

"Man, you're not kidding."

I liked talking to patients. Yvette seemed very friendly and easy to talk to. I sat down in a chair and crossed my legs.

"So, where do you work?"

"Oh," she said, "I work for an insurance company--desk job."

"Do you like it?"

"Yeah, it's going ok--I've only been there about one year. Lately it's been

hard, since my dad died in February." This she said simply but not coldly.

"Oh. I'm sorry to hear that," I said surprised. I was impressed that she would disclose herself in this emotional way.

"Yeah, like I was telling your dad...it's just really hard to have him gone. But, I'm doing okay..." She went on. She asked me about my summer, where I was going to school, what I was studying. I asked about the rest of her family and let her talk.

The examination room contained a simple exam table, cabinets and some scattered towels--and Yvette's openness. Glad to be done the day's work and to be out of the humid heat, she de-stressed. The lights off, so the patients can relax, the soft summer sun lit the room for our conversation. When fifteen minutes were up she got off the heat and started her therapy with my dad. From this time on, we talked most of the time, and I began to see her better. So she came and we worked on her back, trying to help her walk straighter. She talked; I listened. She lay in the cool and received therapy.

This first visit was to be followed by many more of startling similarity. And so, we came to know each other. Her talking and me sitting in the corner of the room with the soft light-- listening. Therapizing.

Being in such close quarters with my dad was strange, even within the context of work. We looked much alike and shared many mannerisms--especially being around each other as much as we were. We had the same brown hair. Each of us five feet ten inches tall. Nine and a half shoe size. But our past distance seemed ever-present to me. Since my parents' divorce when I was a baby, the only time I spent in the same house as my dad was spent in visiting mode. It was not--wake in the morning and say "hey dad." "Hey dad's" were every other Friday night. But now, at nineteen, I saw him every morning at work. Strange that it should be that way--strange that we spent so much time together that summer.

We did, thankfully, have a good relationship. I wanted to work with him that summer; I was excited to hear every day's news, to share with him what I thought about Rushdie's novel. And he was excited too. However, being near to my dad like this brought out old questions, asked long ago. Questions eventually forgotten in a multitude of days. Questions that now lifted their heads--moved their stiff lips. Vicinity is important. So I sat at my desk, pushed paper, talked with patients, with my dad, ate lunch. And the questions jabbered on behind my head.

Each question, each moving mouth, was really about the one Question. The, "who am I?" Maybe, I thought, I would ask the same thing another way and use Rushdie's words: "what kind of idea am I?" Or maybe I would just listen.

A son almost always thinks that his father should play a part in the answering.

My times sitting in the corner with Yvette became more regular. She told me

about her job--about how this or that co-worker had offended her. She talked about how her boyfriend Jay's friends were telling her how happy he was with her. "I make him happy," she said. I believed her. Sitting there, in the cool, I would interject comments or questions. Yvette would ask what I was up to on the weekends and how I was doing. But mostly I just wanted to listen--to express myself by letting her express herself. So, we continued to get to know one another, and each day she came in I would, like clockwork, make sure: "You're not too stressed are you?"

Yvette's spine was improving. My dad put her on a strengthening program and worked to mobilize her joints. Her pain was going down. Conversation was easy, and I filled my role as listener consistently. As therapy progressed and we continued to talk I began to see two things: that her words spoken were all really just one question asked, and that I found it easier to try to answer her question than to attempt my own. She talked about work, about Jay, about her weekends. Words, anxieties, anticipations--without an answer. And so she kept asking, "who am I?" And I listened. Easier to answer for someone else than to answer for oneself. This I saw. And so we continued on in this way.

My days with my dad also regularized and lost some of their initial strangeness, although lips still kept moving and the question continued to be uttered just behind my head. Lunch, coffee in the mornings, peanut m & m's--even though its 103
undisciplined. We too talked, dad and I, about various things. About the un-necessity of the giant mall and the drawbacks to busy east coast life. We spoke of revelation and worship. He taught me about the spine: cervical, thoracic, and lumbar. I learned how the muscles work. We too talked. And I told him what Rushdie had to say--but I did not ask the question.

We lived together in that office. The denied house of childhood was now being allowed. In a way. But in any case, the days moved on and the summer kept going under our feet. The humid days poured down and the morning drive past the mall went on. The room of gym equipment stayed cool and most people learned to walk with their chest up and their chin down. So living with my dad progressed, but the past kept on asking its Question; the part I omitted from Rushdie's novel: "what kind of idea am I?"

Then came the day. I sat at my desk and listened to the mini fountain carry my stress away. All calm--normal day.

Yvette came in with her head down. Forgetting to sign in, she went straight to an examination room without saying anything and closed the door. My dad and I looked at each other. I went back to the closet and got her hot pack ready. Perhaps she is just over-hurried today, I thought. Overstressed. My dad continued to jot down some notes at his desk. Yvette opened the door.

I tried, "Is everything okay Yvette?" She lay down on the hot pack. She sighed heavily then closed her eyes tightly. A slow tear escaped her left eye and fell down her cheek.

Usually, my friendly conversationalist--now she could not speak. "What could make this girl, usually so upbeat, so terribly lost for joy?" Her father had slipped away; she was emotional; her job stressed her. But what was this that turned her so drastically into the closed up, hurting woman that lay before me? Vicinity is important. Her grief sat on my heart. I saw old sadness, past scenes of sorrow and the deep indwelling of thick loneliness. I saw the Question.

"I'm sorry," I said. "It will be okay, Yvette. I know it will." I walked over to the cabinet and folded a towel. Placing it over her eyes I tried to calm her with the presence of someone being there. Still trying to help her with her question. She needed therapy. And I wanted to speak to what kind of person she was and to what kind of idea she might be. I wanted her to hear the answer coming to her over long years of troubles, wants and need--wanted her to see the caravan approaching off in the distance that carried her answer about a life lived and choices made and about a dead father. But I continued to listen as I had done from the first day and said nothing. My presence was all I could offer.

I decided to let her rest--we couldn't have talked that day. Just before I shut the door she said, softly, "Thank you, sweetie."

My dad remained at his desk, jotting notes.

I had helped Yvette with her Question, or tried to. I did not have her answer for her, but I had given her all I could--I had offered her my presence. A towel rested on her eyes for comfort. Someone was with her.

We waited together.

I wondered, "what would become of my Question?"

A voice asked, "who am I?" A mouth spoke: "what kind of idea am I?" Lips continued to move. Words spoken over moments and decisions; over mental revisions, visitations and crying. And then I thought, as I sat down at my desk and listened to my little fountain, who will therapize the therapist?

Chest up, chin down. Tilt your pelvis--brace with your abdominals. Do your exercises. I must try to walk straight.

Judge's Comments

I was taken by the directness, the steadiness, the earnestness of this essay. The writer stays focussed on a summer job, a distant father, and a distraught client to address his own questions of identity.

Adventures of the Naysayer

There is a certain kind of idea that can only be hatched in the wee hours of the morning. It is not always the bad kind of idea or even the foolish kind of idea (Those are, after all, perfectly common in the daylight hours). The kind of idea to which I am referring is the kind most accurately described as "fly-by-night," and when, at two in the morning, you and a group of people you hardly know are kicked out of a coffee shop and find yourselves on the road to Canada, that is a "fly-by-night" idea. Literally.

I do not remember whose brilliant plan it was to take off for Canada in the middle of the night with half the cast and crew of the Spring play. Just because you can drive for six hours and end up in a foreign country doesn't mean you ought to, and usually people walk through life quietly ignoring such notions. In the event that someone finds himself incapable of suppressing such a thought, he usually blurts it out, and everyone laughs at the splendid joke.

Well, whoever had the idea blurted it out, and we all laughed. All, that is, except for someone who said, "Why not?" and then, "Let's."

Somehow, within minutes, about ten other people agreed that this was a great idea, that we had plenty of drivers, that we couldn't possibly make the trip at any other time, and that if we got started within the hour, we could arrive in Ontario in time to catch the morning service at West View Baptist. They began to call seats in the cars. 105

I had not yet agreed to go.

Under any other circumstances, I would have been deeply hurt at being left out. But suddenly I was hoping that no one would notice me.

See, the whole thing was starting to remind me of all those "coming-of-age" movies I've seen--the kind of movies where a cast of four or five kids between the ages of eleven and thirteen have unforeseen adventures during the sixties, bond forever, and live to narrate the movie as their wisened, grown-up selves. The main character is a rookie, still learning to be streetwise, and he always has a cool friend who is familiar with the ways of the world. They are accompanied by the plucky comic relief, and the Naysayer. More about him later.

Now, until that night I always flattered myself with the belief that I was the rookie, the protégé. I knew I had much to learn, but I was sure that when the right adventure came along, I would rise to the occasion and come-of-age smoothly. If not, I figured I could at least be the comic relief. Unfortunately, I knew otherwise as soon as I heard the excuses spilling out of my mouth right and left.

They were top of the line excuses, the most convincing ones I could think of. I was tired. I hadn't showered. I'd have to pack. I had homework due. What would my mother say.

And suddenly I realized just which character in this drama I really was: the Naysayer.

The Naysayer doesn't want to engage in reckless adventures. The Naysayer thinks it sounds risky and wonders if anybody would like to play checkers instead. The Naysayer looks like a cow chewing its cud.

"Look," someone said, "If we don't do this all together, all at once, right now, we never will. It wouldn't be the same to plan it for later."

"I don't have a driver's license," I pleaded, "I couldn't pull my weight." There it was. I knew something would come to me.

"No problem."

Shoot. "Are you sure you guys can make it that far? None of us have had more than thirty hours of sleep total in the last week."

"No sweat. We'll trade off."

I was out of ammunition, and I knew it.

106 They gave everyone half an hour to shower and pack for the next day. I worked quickly, all the while trying not to think what my mother would have said if I had popped in at two in the morning and announced I was going to Canada. The sheer nonsense of the thing dragged me down like chunky toddlers clinging to my legs. Yes, I was responding to peer pressure! Yes, I was going somewhere with people I hardly knew! Yes, we would be driving all night with no sleep! Yes, the plan did involve a foreign country! Yes, I was probably making my most arbitrary decision ever, and, no, I would not be left behind.

My roommate woke up while I was scrounging for two matching socks.

"What are you doing?" she groaned, shielding her eyes.

"Listen," I said, "I'm going to Canada. With the guys from the play. Just for tonight, okay? Go back to sleep."

"Oh, okay." She rolled over and pulled a blanket over her head. No good: Holly wouldn't remember a word of the conversation the next morning, so I left a post-it note on our mirror:

Gone to Canada for church. Not kidding. See you tomorrow.

And I was mad when Holly went to Chicago without warning me first.

The trip itself was both memorable and basically uneventful. We drove all night, and I slept in the back seat of J. R.'s Cadillac until I woke at a gas station with a crick in my neck. This same black Cadillac was searched at the border, along with all its passengers, including me, and I concluded that I should have taken the time to brush my hair on the American side. I look more disreputable when my hair is unbrushed.

I picked a dandelion on the Canadian side of the border. It was exactly like an Indiana dandelion, but I pressed it anyway, in one of the books that I had brought along but neglected to read.

I took pictures of anything with the word "Canada" on it or the Canadian flag. Wouldn't it be nice, I thought, to develop all my pictures, take them home for the summer and be able to go straight from, "This is us outside of the Dining Commons" to "This is my trip to Canada," and back to shots of the Sammy Morris statues?

We did go to church, just as planned. And we managed to squeeze in a two hour nap afterwards. I felt slightly vindicated at lunch, when one of the guys in the group prayed, "And Lord, thank you for protecting us on the way up here, because... what can I say?" After lunch, we started on the long drive home.

The notoriety lasted a little longer than the trip.

Days Gone By

A handy guide to identifying a driver's geographic origins: One hand on wheel, one hand on horn: Chicago. One hand on wheel, one finger out window: New York. One hand on wheel, one finger out window, cutting across all four lanes of traffic: New Jersey.

I read that in a Reader's Digest not too long ago. A woman named Clair Martin sent it in from the Denver Post. I don't know if the writer said these things from personal experience or if she was monopolizing a stereotype. Either way, it's pretty accurate except that I only cut across two lanes to get to my exit the other day; that's all there are on the Indiana Interstate, and the only driver around to flick off was myself, so I didn't bother. My date for the evening, Steve, just laughed and asked as he had five hundred times already, "Can I drive?"

I played along and stubbornly replied, "No!" This was the second date Steve and I had been on, the other had been nearly a year earlier and was absolutely disastrous. After a year of continuing to get to know one another we decided another friendly date could do no harm. So, there was Steve again, a Colorado boy, with his long legs folded into my passenger's seat with his knees still firmly pressing against the dashboard of my '89 Ford Tempo, continuing in his playful tone, "Say something Joisey for me."

I raised an eyebrow at him and exaggeratedly said, "The other day I went to a caffeehouse with a girl from Baustin. We baught glasses of wooder and ate arenges from Flarida which only caust a quarta but tasted harible."

The steel spiral staircase appeared to dissolve heavenward in a mass of metal before my five year old eyes. There was a snaking line of people above and below me, and it was hot. I got nervous as I continued the slow ascent; not really knowing where I was going or why. My father urged me on, so I continued up the triangular wedged steps, the railing slick from the sweaty palms of hundreds of people in front of me. The first glowing rays of natural light began filtering into the coil of people and metal and I knew we were reaching the top. Stepping onto the platform I was exposed to absolute blue. There wasn't a cloud in the sky, and as I quickly strained my head upwards I saw her spires sticking out, and her arm extended holding her torch high. And then it was over. Descending the staircase I knew that I had fulfilled a right of passage. There was something in the magnitude of that scene; I caught the spirit and the pride, and in my childhood understanding I associated it with the city beside it.

They say an open plain is a way to find peace. Whether water or land, if you can see to the horizon, there's a chance to find yourself in that open, vulnerable space. The flat fields of corn alarmed me when I arrived in Indiana. I had never felt so exposed in my life. As our boxy white van, packed full of my most important belongings, struggled to stay on the windy two lane highway, I stared out onto a landscape void of houses, buildings, trees, or even hills. I expected a tornado to come swooping through at any second; there was nothing to hinder its progress. But the rows of corn just continued their sway and I contemplated them as my new ocean. This was going to be my life for the next four years: college in Indiana, at Taylor University.

I grumbled awake roughly two weeks later to the scratching static of yet another radio station whose broadcasting came sporadically. Confounded once again about being out in the middle of nowhere I rolled out of bed. I had been out till 2 a.m. the night before so I slowly picked out some clothes to wear and began a languid morning routine; my roommates still both fast asleep. I stepped out of the bathroom about ten minutes later with my long, thick hair still dripping wet to the frantic blinking of an unanswered IM on my screen, "turn the radio on!"

The green three-pronged leaf hung so its lightly-shaded underside flapped into view with the blowing wind. I sat at my desk, eyes staring out the window, fixed on this particular leaf hanging off the branch of a large oak tree for upwards of an hour, nothing changing, but for the slight breeze outside and the inflection of the man's voice on the radio. I felt frozen in time, like I was going to faint but the blackness wouldn't come. 109

Her screams woke me from my trance. Sandra lived next door, she had a penchant for dramatics, but she was from Long Island and I knew we were going through this together. I could hear Katie Couric's professionally controlled voice on the television before I had even fully entered the room. Sandra looked up from her randomized pacing and helplessly reached out her arms to me.

Arms and hands crossed and clasped together we sat down on the couch. For the first time my eyes were exposed to the scene. Mid-gasp my entire body lodged in my throat choking out the air. The News channel 4 skycam was broadcasting footage of the upper levels of the two towers, the one on the left bursting with a hot, red-orange flame, the beautiful tower billowing a thick gray smoke like the sinister stacks of industrious Elizabeth, New Jersey, ten minutes away. They cut to cameras on the street filming people trying to flee the scene; the usually stony controlled faces that walk the Financial District were running, panic and horror revealed in their eyes and contorted expressions. Still struggling to comprehend what was happening they cut back out to the sky; there was a plane. It looked so small and blackened against the bright morning sky. I thought they were showing the film they had of the plane going into the first tower – I realized it was live once the plane and towers were both on the screen and heard confusion screaming in my ear, "but the tower's already hit!

Why is the plane still there?" And then it felt as if in slow motion the plane entered into the building like a stone dropping into water – only vertically. The tower enveloped the plane, debris exploding out the other side, bursting into flames. Sandra was on her feet screaming again. She resumed her pacing around the room, phone in hand, alternately saying over and over again, "Oh my god, oh my god" with yelling at the phone to work. No phone line was open in the tri-state area for hours.

I gazed through vacant foggy eyes in total disillusionment at the screen, my body heavy and tired. My eyes were caught in the vision of the day the earth and sun positioned themselves so perfectly that from my backyard I could see the two gleaming towers reflecting the orange-yellow of the setting sun. I saw the beauty that day, as the glow slowly moved down the buildings, but not in the way I would have had I known I'd never see it again. My parents were now looking at that same view, but were seeing the smoke, live, in the sky right before them. The television screen registered in my mind again, and I saw the two black towers standing tall for the last time, their tops still erupting in flames and smoke. As the buildings crumpled down within one another into a massive cloud of dust and fire my entire world felt incognizant. Sandra was screaming again, but she sounded so far away. She grabbed my shoulder and shook me saying, "My brother's fiancée is in there!" And suddenly a rush of panic seized me.

110 I had never been so thankful for the Internet. IM's from home, from friends then scattered across the country at their respective colleges came blinking onto my screen. But, one by one, my worst fears were coming true; Julie's father – missing; Rachel's father – missing; Mr. Jennings – missing; Brian's father – missing; Rebecca's father – missing; Emily's father – missing; Mr. Moore – missing; Kristen's father – missing; Mr. Johnson – missing; even people I went to school with: Joel – missing; Ben – missing.

I somehow managed to finish preparing myself for my 11 o'clock class. Despite the 80 degrees outside, I put on my uncle's worn-soft and faded blue fireman sweatshirt. The sweatshirt stayed on all day. I was in a state of shock where temperature did not affect me. I walked to class in an auto-pilot spell; the sunshine, bell tower, and people passing only a brief peripheral phenomenon. The upstairs hallway of the liberal arts building was crowded with people whose shoulders I nudged on by.

The sun was glaring through the windowed far wall onto the backs of the rowed desks and students in my World History class. I looked up to find my way to my desk and for the first time that day received a reality check. Other people were being affected by this too. All morning I thought that only people such as Sandra and I who were from the area would be upset about the incident. I walked into the room and was confronted by a whole new set of stricken faces; it confused me as to why. I raised my eyes slowly to meet theirs in a vacuous stare and continued lethargically to my seat. I did not say a word. My professor got up and explained how class was suspended for the day but that he'd like to open things up for a class discussion. I still did not say a word, I could not. So I sat and listened to the questions asked, "Why the

World Trade Center?" "Where is the World Trade Center?" I tuned them out and got lost in the faint melancholy chiming of the bells outside and wondered once again, "how could I possibly be here right now?" I had never felt so homesick.

My attention was brought back when speculation began as to who was responsible for the act. Most obviously terrorists, but who? And from where? I listened to girls from Indiana, Illinois, Ohio who had absolutely no connection to anyone hurt or missing, who did not even know where the towers were located prior to that morning, girls who had never even been to the city, cry and ask, "How could anyone have done this?" And still I did not speak. I sat there for an hour and each word became harder and harder to hear. The professor asked for any specific prayer requests at the close of the class and I finally raised my hand. I found the voice to speak, and I spoke of friends, of people with names who were at that moment experiencing the true horror of what was happening. I told them of people I had known, that were now missing, and quietly my voice gave way. I watched the heads of many of my classmates look down, but no one made a move to comfort me. I resolved not to let them see me cry. I allowed only two tears to fall during the prayer – and I quickly swept them away; bitterness dusted the rest dry.

That night attempting to retain a bit of normalcy I headed over to Samuel Morris, one of my favorite buildings on the Taylor campus. The largest men's dormitory, it's a massive, white-columned brick building with stone steps leading up to the front door. There, my roommates and I met up with some friends. The group of us hung out in the lounge, watched a movie and around 11 we turned on the news. They were, of course, still broadcasting footage from that morning's events and as I watched in rapture the interviews of several witnesses I heard some chuckling coming from one of my new friends. He then said, "I think it's about time we instated the twelve-hour rule." I just stared at him waiting for someone to ask him what that was.

"Oh, you know, after twelve hours of continuous coverage of any major disaster you can then start making fun of the morons they find to interview."

He, to my knowledge, was the first person I lost due to September 11.

Over the next several days I went to the special chapels, participated in the special prayer times, and even sang, "It is Well With My Soul" along with all the other students. But the subtle bitterness towards those crying without any specific reason, towards those praying with that extra special sugar coating of Christian love remained. I rejoiced quietly as word trickled in of fathers and friends found, at my own personal miracle stories. Kristen's father wasn't in the building that day, Ben and Joel were volunteering so faithfully that they had just been separated from their departments, Mr. Johnson trapped in the city began putting his pastoral abilities to work counseling those on the streets, Sandra's sister-in-law got out in time. As I learned of each new story a weight was lifted, but I also grieved quietly. I was one of the luckier ones from our area; I only knew three people who lost their lives. Yet the stories are still sad, fathers of children in my mother's third grade Sunday school class, seniors in my old high school whose "best year of your life" was completely shattered, relatives of people

I grew up with at church, all presumed dead, their bodies still not found.

Life at Taylor moved on. Discussion still popped up from time to time during classes, professors finding it pertinent to point out comparisons or talk about the war against the Taliban, but over all interest quickly fizzled. Distance worked its interesting charm and soon even for me it became a dissipated memory.

Thanksgiving hit me hard – it meant flying into New York City. In the early morning hours before driving to the Indianapolis airport I walked out alone into the cold, wet grass of the field behind my dorm and stared up into the vast Indiana sky and cried. I needed the release. I laid myself down, not caring if my pajama pants or sweat-shirt got wet and dirty and took in a display of sky that I would never find where I come from. Lying there in a field so far from home I witnessed the most glorious light show I had ever seen. The bright white orbs of the Leonids streaked across a sky that I could see all the way to the horizon. A continuous theatric of God's beauty in the sky, and as the meteors died down and my body shivered in the cold I found a peace and value in Indiana that I had not felt before. I thought of the amazing friends I was making, the experiences I was having, and the things that I was learning. I recognized that I was happy and that I finally felt as if I belonged there.

112 The highlight of my trip was when we hit that point in the sky where, looking down, I recognized that I was home. Suddenly, the houses were all packed together, streets went in all different directions, and the habitation of people was incredibly evident. Flying into the city that morning was one of the most amazing moments of my life. I felt like a tourist, straining to see every which way out the window, physically pointing at the buildings I knew, beaming from ear to ear.

I was in New York again, with New York people, New York attitudes, and New York speed. And this was all attended with more American flags hanging than the Fourth of July and Memorial Day combined. I managed to quickly find my family surrounded by the madness of La Guardia during Thanksgiving week. They eagerly greeted me and welcomed me home, but I would have nothing long and drawn out; I was anxious to get outside. When we reached our van I noticed that we, too, had a flag hanging from the front grill; small and rectangular and already showing signs that it had been there awhile, some frayed edges and an over all grimy, city air weathering. Later, when I got home I would discover that that was not the only flag addition – our front porch was adorned with not one, but two flags with spotlights so they could stay out all night. I began to realize that a significant change had come over this area, one which I had failed to be a part of.

Driving home through Queens and the Bronx along the Major Degan, crossing bridges and driving under so many overpasses we were virtually in a tunnel, I began to see how much my perception had changed being out in Indiana. The city looked old, crowded and dirty. The continuous stream of drab gray stone buildings and tacky colored convenience stores coated with a visible, oily, black powder struck such a con-

trast with the long green fields of grass and golden brown plains of plowed corn that I had lived amid the previous months. But still, I was in love with the city.

I remember very little about the actual Thanksgiving Day. My entire purpose and goal that week was to go to Ground Zero. I needed to see it. Two days after Thanksgiving I got my chance. There's a certain mood or spirit that hits me the second my shoes hit the first step descending into the Hoboken PATH (Jersey's underwater extension of the New York Subway system) entrance. It's the same feeling that comes over me when my car rolls onto the George Washington Bridge, or when my eyes catch their initial glimpse of the skyline driving along Rt. 17 towards the city. It comes and goes with the appearance and experience of the city, it's what has made me want to live there since I was a little girl.

When you go to the city it's a necessity that you walk, there is nothing like the sidewalk of a New York City street. We walked miles that day. Downtown, Midtown, Little Italy, Greenwich Village, Canal St. and Times Square. After being away for so long I drank the city in, afraid that it was only a passing mirage. Around noon we decided to head down to the Financial District. As we neared the area the presence of people, traffic, and noise steadily increased. Cars were honking, steam shafts were billowing, traffic cops were yelling and people were talking. My mom asked again as she had so many times that week why I wanted to do this. "I have to."

Even after months of cleanup it was one of the most disturbing scenes of my life. The pile of rubble was still several stories high, and the sight of the charred, stripped, and cracked steel frame of the building still rising about fifteen stories high stood as an emptied reminder of what had once been. A lady standing next to me saw me with my camera and told me that if I was quick I could get up onto the barrier and take some better pictures. I used the fence to my right, still stuck with random cards and bunches of flowers, notes, and photographs, to help boost me up onto the concrete median. I snapped a few pictures trying to keep my head low but a cop saw me and asked me to get down. From then on I just stared in the general direction of the towers along with everyone else, not really seeing anything, but...that was kind of what I came for.

I left the city tired that day. And as I sat on the PATH train I was so thankful to be heading back to Jersey. I thought about the past several months, about the summer, about college, and I realized that it was life and life has a way of filling itself up. I knew that I was glad to be heading back to school, back to a place that was not New York. I understood that day as I looked upon that scene that the city was not my home; it will always hold an allure in my heart, but my home was not destroyed that day. I prepared myself to head back to Indiana.

That summer I went home again. One of the first events I attended was the graduation ceremony at my old high school. The speaker was senior Emily Van Hine's mother, and also wife of New York City Firefighter Bruce Van Hine, killed on

September 11. The scene was incredibly moving as she stepped up to the podium. The crowd hushed and the remaining members of Mr. Van Hine's department stood at attention at the back of the audience. She spoke of the body of Christ, and especially mentioned I Corinthians 12:12-27: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though its parts are many, they form one body...if one part suffers, every part suffers with it." I looked around at my old friends, teachers, and acquaintances and wished that I could have been with that body the previous September, and then I realized that I was totally missing the point. I was being an arrogant toe who didn't think that its pain could have any effect at all on the foot. It was a difficult thing to admit to myself and something that to this day I still struggle with and have to remind myself of when people from Taylor begin discussing their reactions to September 11. We are all part of the same body of Christ, and therefore when one hurts, we should all hurt even if we aren't directly affected by it.

In late August I was flipping through a Christian newsletter that my mother had brought home. In it there were three pictures of the area where the towers once stood, one with them in all their glory, one with them cinematically smoking, and the last with them gone. It frightened me because my eyes still most naturally fell upon the one with the towers still there – still standing tall, that was what still felt right. I went to Hoboken a few days later and stared for hours out over the Hudson River towards the city trying to condition myself to see the skyline as it is today. I looked out and it wasn't sadness, or fear, or even something as obvious as "something's missing", it was just a diluted confusion that something wasn't there, something to make it real.

One week prior to my departure for my Sophomore year at Taylor I spent the night in Hoboken again with my high school friends. We talked about our year while lounging on benches out on the pier. We reminisced about old times. We talked about going back to school and seeing our college friends again. We talked about the buildings, the water, and the lights. As I sat there with the people I grew up with I understood that they, like the city of my childhood, would always seem somewhere more familiar.

Judge's Comments

The September 11 essay is a hard one to write, but Laurie Susen convinces me of the authenticity of her own experience. Without trivializing the tragedy, she blends it with her own search for a true home.

September 11, 2002

Today I choose not to look at the television replays of suicide planes and burning, collapsing buildings. It is morbid and misguided to give such media muck my attention. There is no need to soak my consciousness with images of evil. I choose instead to focus on the mystery that God is sovereign and He is still in control.

Today I choose not to listen to any more firsthand accounts of the horror that people experienced that day. It is all too obvious by now that mere words cannot justly describe such unspeakably awful events. There is no need to voyeuristically gawk at those in despair, vicariously reveling in their pain. I choose instead to listen for God's voice as I pray for those who are still suffering.

I choose not to sing "God Bless America" nor to wave a flag today in a show of patriotism. It is far more appropriate to implore Americans to bless God for a change. There is no need to call upon Him to shower us with more blessings than He already has. I choose instead to beg for his forgiveness and his mercy because of the brash way in which we, as a nation, have squandered the undeserved favor He has already shown us.

Today I choose not to relive nor retell my own tale of where I was and what I was doing, thinking, feeling this day last year. It is nothing compared to the firsthand experiences of my friends in New York City. There is no need to focus on myself because my life remains virtually unchanged by these events. I choose instead to offer quiet support to those who still live the nightmare, acknowledging that I have no idea what they must be going through. 115

Today I choose not to participate in services honoring mortal heroes and rescuers. It is true that many were brave and did great things. Yet there is no need to put some on a pedestal when countless others have performed innumerable and unrecognized acts of unbridled compassion. I choose instead to worship God above all else and to honor every one made in God's image by looking for ways in which I can quietly touch their lives through unmerited, unexpected deeds of kindness.

Today I also choose not to attend ceremonies to commemorate the dead. It is incomprehensible that these innocent lives were snuffed out by such sinister acts. Yet there is no need to fixate on what might have been if their lives had not been cut short. Instead, I acknowledge that I myself have no guarantee of living a long and "complete" life, so I choose to live today realizing that it could be my last, striving to make each moment count for something of eternal worth.

Sky Writing

I used to love to write the sky.

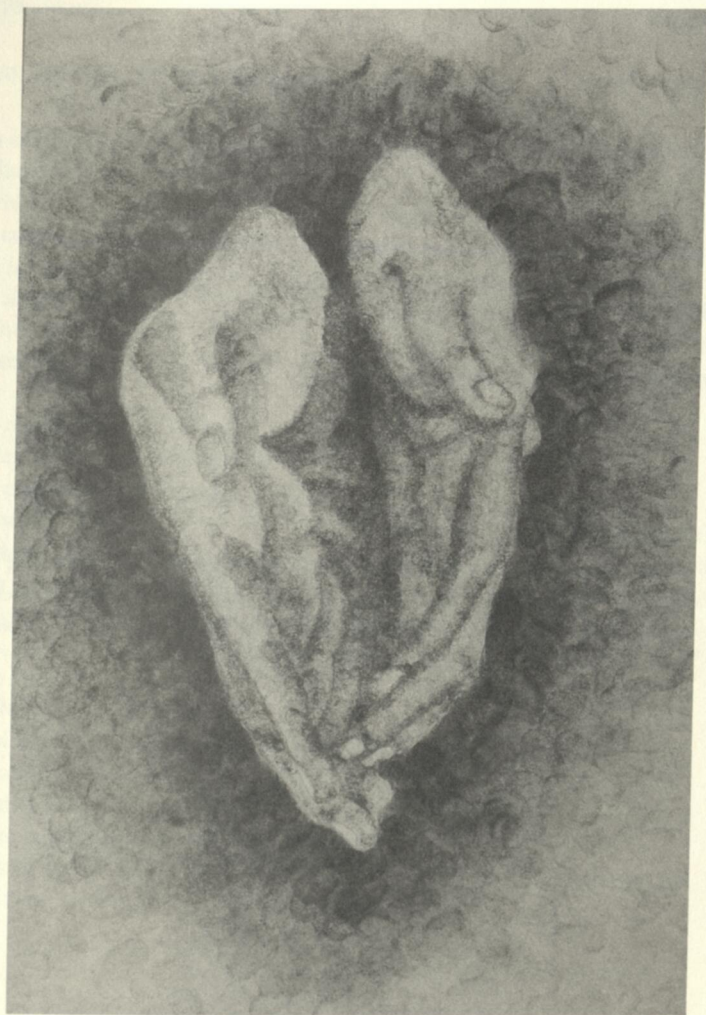
Summer, 2000. India's hot Calcutta streets. A boy named Brian by my side. "I could sit forever and just write about the sky," were my words, quasi-truth. A half-lie. I spoke of the night I transcribed angels' dances with swirling ivory dresses at their feet, stirring the dark clouds against a cobalt sky, no moon in sight. I have not written of the heavens since.

Tonight I try again.

Summer, 2002. Spain's cool night air. My brother and a friend walked next to me through the spray-painted lot behind a high-end shopping center. The sky had one star, white brightness from a celestial core. The sky stretched above the lights of the city to the darkness covering the countryside. Monochromatic shades of blue smeared from one end of the sky to the other, chasing after the sun that had barely disappeared behind an ancient building, one that had watched thousands upon thousands of nights like this come and go, along with the people they brought to its steps.

No technology could create a spectrum so perfect. It is beauty without flaw.

I do not think I can write of the sky again.



Poetry

Emily Glass

Second Place Poetry

The Strange Tale of the Lighting of the Strip Mall

What on the map was a purple stripe
Had coffee and donut shops-all that tripe,
Where the breakfast bananas were served unripe.
But what made it really worth the trip
Was the neon-sparking electric rip
That announced the opening of the strip.

Judge's Comments

I fell hard for the authority of the voice, the inventive opening syntax (the clincher for me), and the overall manner and wit. Listen to that voice (almost Audenesque)! Its attention to both scene and subtleties of sense ("What on the map was a purple
118 stripe")! Its calm, ironic disposition! Sweet indeed.

Whitney Vanderwilt

I am from Spicy Carved Elephants

I am from spicy carved elephants,
From phalaropes and red-ribbon sunsets.

I am apartheid
(dark like coal, lurking like shadows).

I am from jacaranda blossoms
And from shanty towns,
Where stones are weapons
And children are warriors

I am from mealie pap,
And bicycle tires propelled by sticks.

I am from corrugated iron shacks
And passbooks.

From dumkop and "Yes, baas."

I am Drum magazine,
With articles on how to look American, which is glamorous
I am Africa; its blood pounds through my veins.

119

I am from Mandela and DeKlerk
From Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika and the Spear of the Nation

I am my grandfather's hope

I am my father's rage

I am the ferocious lion; I am the battered gazelle

I am a grain of sand

In an eternity of earth.

Elizabeth Boltz

Rufus.

Slur your words
Throw hands in the air
Tell me you're forward
Say you don't care
Long fingers
On strings, on keys
Music lingers
These things, these needs
Drink back your beer
And sing your song
I'll be here
So don't be long
Love like this
Is strange, not rare
And strangely I miss
Your long dark hair
120 A haunting call
Wakes me from rest
I just might fall
Alongside the best
For you are too perfect
And yet you are flawed

No physical defect
But you can't ignore God

Whitney Vanderwilt

Icharus

Broken angel,
Fallen man.
Your exquisite body lies in fragments,
Exceptional, tragic pieces
Of a man of the sky,
A man who flew on wings of valor
Whose flight was simple and smooth
And full of anguish.
Your light has not extinguished;
I see it flicker in your muted eyes.
Your mighty wings still hover over your wounds;
They are well,
Though they failed you.
Their steaming bodies drop beads of wax
Onto your throat and your body melts
Under a bloodthirsty sun.

121

Emily Glass

In Which Addison Poses a Question to God

I have gone along
squeezing the small stones, God,
between my thumb and toughened
forefinger. I have pressed slick stones,
ragged stones
beneath my heel.

I have scooped the flattened pebbles,
struck smooth,
from the cobbled bottoms of shallow streams,
turned them over in my hand.

They were reticent to speak.
fist-sized chunks of rock
gave forth dates, places
of battles, fragments of lost oratory
better left lost.

122 A block of sandstone
rough as sailor's palms
told jokes when coaxed, and riddles
with no answers.
Bits of gravel by the highway-side
spat out sonnets
from time to time.

I listened. To granite walls
I inclined my ear.

So please you, God:
which stone contains
my name?

Everyday

I am the shirt you try on
every morning, but never wear,
you still don't like the way it looks.

I am the mirror you look into
smile and seem pleased,
but you always move on.

I am the backpack you carry
close to you, helpful,
but never really connected.

I am the radio you sing to,
delighting in as you drive
with her, but you turn it off.

I am the friend you
tease every day, smile at
and mess up my hair.

I am the friend you
open up to, then leave for
the much prettier, politer,
more useful ones.

I am myself.
I cannot change.

Jon in London

Tense jaw, grinding
over and over.
Would my fingertips
relax muscle?
Rolling eyes, fed
up with everything.
Would my smile
still constant motion?
Clenched fist, ready
to extend and impact.
Would my hands
open fingers?
Pressed, tight mouth, straight
with condescending disgust.
Would my lips soften
yours with love?

124
Could "the love of a good woman"
turn your heart to heaven?

Lana Gottschalk

A Desert

A desert, a city
Their edges converge.
Peaceful, Empty
A site on the verge
Of becoming to many
A home, the end
Of a journey in life,
Too hard to begin.

The Dream

The dream wrecked my emotions.
I saw her; I saw her face...
Hate, Disbelief, Pain and Disgrace.
She knew me; She knew my intentions.

I woke up grappling with the air.
Over and over it played...
The dream; the Truth
That someone could see through me.

Some say dreams are premonitions.
She would know.
Some say they are personal longings.
I wanted her to know?
Some say dreams are projections of ourselves.
I see through me.
I know the Truth.

The Transformation

Before heat had time to descend,
Before houses whispered activity,
Before dogs stretched and whined,
Before night was completely gone
I quietly found myself on the sidewalk
Facing the rising Sun.

Too many houses,
Too many yards of cacti and rock,
Too much concrete and plaster,
Not enough horizon and mountains,
I drove West, towards the mountains
Facing the rising Dawn.

Saguaro cacti, sand - pink, red, orange;
Purple mountains, pastel sky
The desert beckons at sunrise
To those silent enough to hear her plea.

127

How many knew her mountains color purple,
Then glow orange, then flame red
With the changing angles of
The rising Sun?

In minutes, the sky shone the purest of blues,
The mountains took on their washed out, grayish-purple shade,
Heat pervaded the landscape and began scorching the Earth,
The city began to stir - her glory diminished as people awoke.

Dogs barked;
Numerous motors drowned out
The sound of the morning.
But I had seen it.
The Transformation of Night to Dawn
In the desert.

Cynicism.

If I had a pet snake
I'd like to name it "cynicism"
It might be too long to fit on its I.D. tag,
but I can't think of a better name
for a spineless-cold-blooded reptile
that gives all appearance of being fun and friendly
until it bites your arm,
waking you up in time to hear
your heart stop beating.

Selkie

In beads of silver moisture, the fog
Has written on her brow the knowledge of the sea's secret chambers;
Her eyes are void as the grottos
Where doubt once fused, twisted
Into sleek and plunging silence. No mournful vapour
Could disguise this, or the posture of her defeat,
Sprawled like flotsam beside discarded shoes.

The shore was gray, veiled this way, when she slipped from her skin
Like oil and went among the clammy rocks;
When McGannon touched her chin with square fingers,
And whispered that he loved
The wild tendrils of her hair
That tangle around her arms like the brown sea grass,
Her white neck. It is stretched now,
Longing after the forms of seals:
Veiled shadows in the waves below, a ring
Of mournful heads that break
Like stones of shipwreck from the waves.

129

What did she know of leather shoes or shuttered windows
When he called her from among the rocks,
And gave her ribbons for her hair?
The taste of salt is ever on her lips now,
When she peels the onions and when the thousand silver arms
Of the air bring the yawn of the sea to her ears
In handfuls.

A lone form upon the rock, unmoving:
Her fierceness is distilled, a damp suspension to mingle
With the silver fog. She shuts her eyes,
Desiring only to grasp it, draw it near her, wrap it round,
And wear it like the skin
McGannon burned.

Thaddeus Reade, on His Death Bed, Tells His Daughters of His Late-Night Vision

Alone, a night in summer, far into dark,
I stood in what seemed a field turned into stone
and from each corner of the field were lights
on poles, but poles that reached the height of trees
and each one bright as ten of ours, unwavering,
suns that lit a wholly different world
where buggies were made of metal and glass, no hitch
for horses, and so many, different-hued,
side by side by side throughout that field
as if they'd grown there, planted like rows of flowers.

'Twas light told me I stood on holy ground,
or near at least, for the light I speak of shone
out of the sky in a straight, unbroken line
that met the earth a distance off from me.

- 130 What place was this, I wondered, a place so bathed
in light and singled out by sign from heaven.
Perhaps I'd spoken aloud because just then
two youths emerged from two sides of a buggy,
a woman and a man dressed oddly in clothes
that fit like flour sacks or sleeping gowns.
The lady asked, "Mister, are you okay?"
I said I was, then suddenly recalled
these weeks in my bed, my body flushed with fever
and waking to a daughter's hand on my brow,
so in this dream or vision in the night
I told the youths I might have died, or might
be sleeping still. (I did not think them angels.)
I asked them where I was. Both said the word
together: Taylor. What was I to say?

A moment passed. We stared as through a mirror
into lands beyond our own, until, grown bold,
the young man laughed and pointed at my jacket:
"Your clothes," he said, "are like old-fashioned stuff.
I know: there was a play on campus, right?"

I shook my head. Our times had clashed. Perhaps
our Father, for some reason I couldn't guess,
wanted to show this old sick minister
how the work goes on, would be all right without me.
So knowing I was somewhere I couldn't long stay
I asked the question that meant the most to me:
"The light...how, why?" And now both youths laughed.
"Twas not from God, they said. That light they called
"electric" and came from two towers near,
one which stood for faith, and one for learning,
but told me so with no more awe than if
they'd pointed out a barn door. At any moment
I felt this sight would vanish, and here they stood,
my two guides-would they show me the towers?
They agreed, and so together we walked
through that stone field, past silent buggies, under
a midnight sky that seemed the only unchanged,
though to believe these youths, was yet our Taylor,
built up in city style aglow at night
as if the world's fair now graced Upland.

131

At length we came to these two towers, and this
is what I saw: two columns made of brick
reached heavenward, like arms raised in the air
as if to give a blessing campus wide,
a benediction made of brick and light.
I thought it looked quite beautiful but felt
as if I were a tourist come too late,
a traveler come too far, past so many
borders, he could no longer say what country
it was he stood in.

Strange, marvelous dream
my daughters, and I tell you it because
it might bring peace to you - to know, at least
your father does not suffer without some grace,
that while my fevered body tosses in this bed
I am permitted trips out of doors,
and that the land is not so unfamiliar
that I go to, and that it's filled, alas, with light.

vicarious.

stairwell singer
echoing rhythm
resounds from cinder
blocks reminding
me of melody's promise.
taunting that the
purpose is the
future girl
not the
present girl.
aching strings
pulled by song's
sweet reminders
of all the passions
that plague me.
carefully chorused words
hold meaning not
just for you--
I love the songs too.
as up I run
I pause and hear
and my eyes close and
I listen and remember
and ache that
the song is calling
and I want it for my own.
I leave the stairs
yet continue
loving the stairwell song
and living through a song
that is not mine.

e.c. newman

Stupid Superstitions

The mirror
exposes lies.
I am not
what I
think.
I am what
I see.
Big hair,
uneven eyes,
fat lips,
double chin,
cellulose down
to the toes.
Seven years
bad luck
is a
relief.

133

Brad Johnston

Sea Story

When you find me, you won't know my story,
but, I will have one. A rough life
I have lived in that tumultuous sea.

Even I, after so much time...
...to ponder many things, don't know my history, for
the salt-erosion and years of turmoil have corroded my memory.

I am but a remnant of the past,
yet this is my beauty. It is mystery.
Where is the rest of me I wonder? Disconnected so long ago.

Well. I suppose I could have been
a pirate's bottle of gin:
Thrown to the surface of the angry seven seas during a violent mutiny.

134 Or could I have been
a drunken bride's last virgin drink on a Caribbean cruise ship:
Tossed into the churning glass water
before she was taken by the groom.

Or maybe I was
a lost sailor's last hope. If so,
Where did that desperate message scrawled upon the paper end up?
Has the man found his way?

We will never know
where I came from.
But if we did,
would it come as disappointment? Would my beauty be shattered?

I am just a wonder, and that is the mystery of me.

Derek Shields

End's Gaze

The old lioness gets up slowly
The end has finally come round about
She heads up to the high rise
A flashing light leaves no doubt
She finds the shade of the old tree
It's the final sprint to the finish line
Her eyes slowly pan all that is below
A legacy will hopefully be left behind
A final gaze stabilizes as she sinks
What was known slowly becomes no more
Air rushes out as she hits the ground
Closing is the one way door
A breeze carries away the dust as her eyes close

Leslie Anne Wise

Portrait

splash color on my body
paint me like a canvas
create an art in me that speaks of truth
choose pastels for my arms and chest, deep blue for my legs
and shades of avalanching white to hide my tear-stained eyes
and maybe i'll heed the signs

splash color on my body
impress upon my soul
an imprint of another place and time
one where i am beautiful and younger than i seem
a green and purple valley with a crystal water blue
black and white hurts my eyes

splash color on my body
if for nothing else

136 than to make me finally see the artist's wish
to no longer paint in abstract but to clarify his mind
avoiding any threat of running paint and tangled hearts
your medium i could never hope to be

Leslie Anne Wise

for elaine's words

i asked what she was doing. she smiled carefully and replied, 'smelling fall.' i fell silent.
i was planning and wondering and thinking and busying myself with insignificant
nonsenses and she was smelling fall.

i stood silent.

i'd been moving and walking and anticipating and heading to every place that led
nowhere and she was smelling fall.

i was silent.

i'd been talking and listening and living and dying and thrilling and diving and she was
smelling fall.

'do you want to smell fall?' she inquired, handing me opportunity in a small silken
handful .

'yes...'

i sat silent.

and i smelled fall.

John Bundick

The City Bridge, Broken

June 2001- City

So white and crystalline,
The purity, the gleaming, icy purity,
Walls sheer and cleanly cut
Reflecting the ultra-violet light,
 Blinding, blinding light
 That makes me feel so dark

June 2001- Bridge

Over this Bridge I will travel,
-fleeting water fleeing the Fear-
with hopes of seeing the land of marble

June 2001-Broken

138

O Lord!
How I miss telling you everything!
Lord, hear this cry from my lips!
Make this mess yours,
Strip Adam's son of his arrogance,
God! Oh God!
I plea that you talk with me again,
Be not the God of these heavens,
Or the God of the seas,
Or of the Temple on the Mount,
But be the God of this man!

Rebekah Denison

Regent Street, London

A gray sky presses its weight into the Earth.
City faces fixed downward, avoiding cold rain.

A yellow finch
shakes rain from his wings,
hops along wet branches,
opens his beak and sings.

The arched overhang of Neiman Marcus
is the only umbrella
for a wrinkled woman,
wrapped in a tattered brown blanket.
The bird's refrain lingers in her mind.
Shadows become her bed.
She swallows more vodka
to smudge the day
and sleeps.

139

Awakened in moonlight
seeking a memory of song,
her vacant eyes search the night
and find only puddles,
where music has dissolved.

Rebekah Denison

Fragments

I sealed my dreams in a bag
and marched them down to an ocean cave.
They hummed funeral dirges,
clinked against each other
and cracked.
Each one a hollow body
of dusty glass.
I remembered feeling them once
malleable between my fingers,
but now hardened and polluted.

A red, evening sun on my back
left long shadows as I walked
until I found a black cave,
empty with echoes of dripping water
and the salty smell of seaweed.

140 I threw my bag of dreams against the cave wall,
and in the darkness
could only hear them shatter
against stone.
I left rejoicing
in the fragility
of the splintered shards
resting on the cave floor.

But pieces followed me,
stuck to the bottom of my shoes,
latched onto my pant legs.
They stalked me for days--
a stubborn army of fragments
tugging at my pants and sleeves
and snickering.
Until I swept them up in a dustpan
and gave them a proper burial.

Rebekah Denison

In A Boyfriend's Kitchen

Drunk--

Because I thought you liked me better
that way--

I walked toward you on a cold kitchen tight rope,
naked feet following a line between tiles,
only your face in focus
against a blurred background.

You laughed

at my instability,

placed your hand inches near

the side of my waist

to brace my body.

I wanted that grip to hold me together,

but I slid between your fingers,

untouched.

Rebekah Denison

Third Place Poetry

New Mexico

The mountains stretch out like a lazy yawn,
painted perfect but so small
Against the tall, blue southwestern sky.
I never dreamed that sky,
With its stilled white clouds,
could sink under my skin
and sprawl out beneath it,
making me think I'd swallowed sunshine.
Or maybe
it was watching hues of red, pink, orange hearts
blur into something brighter than the sunset,
or holding the tanned splintered hands of new friends
that let me leave New Mexico believing
my heart was speckled by its sun.

142

Judge's Comments

"New Mexico" registers a commanding, convincing voice, eager to lean in and witness (and witness to) the palpable mystery of that haunted landscape's effects.

Elaine Friedberg

Summer's Baptism

"Nightswimming" my litany
and fragrant wind my holy oil
I shouted the thrill of the flight.
Car lights left on, twin beams
a beacon illuminating
my pilgrimage to the river,
creating clarity
in the opacity of night.

Long-stemmed grasses parted
to reveal the gilded surface
Queen Mab's temple floor.
Stepping out of my inhibitions
I broke the sacred stillness of the water.
Time slowed.
I swear I saw the earth move.
I floated on the void
while water and sky entwined.

Arms outstretched
I lay on my back
with my face to the distant stars.
Then
curled up like a fetus
in the water's womb
I sank slowly,
organically wrapped into myself.

143

Elaine Friedberg

Orange ViewMaster

Orange ViewMaster in a box of junk.
Inside the eyepiece
is a plastic world--
an always-safe haven
in Technicolor tones.

Pooh's got a bowl of honey
but his paw is trapped inside;
Tigger's stuck mid-bounce
a smile frozen to his aching cheeks;
Eyeore wanders in a melancholichaze
with no hope for redemption; and
Piglet's damned to everlasting naïveté .

World without end.
Amen.

Nathalie Williams

Dorothy

close my eyes and whisper a prayer
tap my heels together three times
open my eyes
nothing's changed
what did i do wrong?

i was going to call you
but i didn't know what to say
so i sat at home and thought of you
every moment of the day

why can't things just work out for once
why can't the world go our way

now you see
why i didn't want to say this
now you see
why i didn't want to care

Elaine Friedberg

I'd Have Written This Earlier if I Knew it Was Your Birthday

The first time I saw you
I sort of fell
unexpectedly
into your eyes. They were so deep and brown.
Maybe you introduced yourself
and maybe
I smiled.
But all I remember
is the damp grass
and that sudden
fall.

Days flew and dust settled
and one semester gone.
No long talks over coffee,
no late-night laughs or inside jokes
146 but I wanted to be your friend.
To go on adventures
in the woods or the streets,
or maybe just
Frisbee and steaks.
We'd be unstoppable.

Those flying days.
You invited me to go with you
but I wasn't sure-
didn't want to intrude, you know. I went anyway
and somewhere
between Elvis and IHOP and those first
long talks over coffee,
late-night laughs and inside jokes,
I was your friend.
We went on adventures,
the streets and the roofs
and sometimes just
Frisbee and steaks.

You think I lie, cough disbelief
into your hand
but after everything
I still remember
the first time I saw you
and that unexpected fall.

Daniel Peterson

Inspired

Her eyes rise like soft april suns
looking over lovers fields and fathers

Mine, so blistered, forgotten-
Prunes burning in fires I feel the drip drip down-

Once filled, spurting, trickling, dripping away

The heat of midday
Sears hope, lamps aflame
Porches left charred
I hide in the basement, in a blanket

Soft april suns dream of yesterdays
A filling vase: petals smiling at sun's rays at sun's rays- do they?
Or do they lay forgotten, trampled- dead

148 Beside dirty paths; a filthy mess

Between silver yesterdays and murky todays,
Tomorrow and Forever and more stretch out
Their ghostly voices like a sickening rubberband over the hideous Now
Sitting on the edge of my toes
As I trod in an uncertain landscape

I never knew anything so crushing as Time: uncaring, brutal, evil beast

Where are those suns tonight?

Daniel Peterson

Writing Poetry

It is all about the image
and the turning of a phrase,

the turning of the stair.
A single hand on the rail
and fear burning in your arm,
doubt heavy on your fingers.

It is miracle process-
"only by chance"
and the polished ending.
Steps land on troubled ground,
each wood face another line
till top is reached

and we look down
waiting for our stomachs to decide:
"what will it be?"

Perspective or nausea.

149

About Being Us

if i could tell the stories
they would look like this: sinew, stretching around the bone.
the sweat and the blood,
down to the most miniscule vessel, and the fastest beat of the heart.
the knife to make the incisions, the swells, then the scars.
the kiss is euphoric and the embrace is parasitic in its natural form, swallowing.

for it is not the flower, but it is the bud.
the seedling even, that grows into beauty.
it is what is seen, not what is shown,
it is what is real, not what is perceived.
it is the sobs and the fingers in my hair,
the fervid weight of your hands and lips
that make me quiver in our closeness.

we would be the same being, we are now us, we are our everythings.
because if i could take
any piece away from me to keep forever
it would be you.

David Harrity

Days Spent Missing Eden

all life is cognitive by nature,
the thoughts and the feelings from the brain stem,
into the heart and out of the eyes and mouths of the fallen ones
all emotion is only made bearable by the One
the Creator of it all, the Master of every dwindling thought.
and i am mourning because of the past, because of the was
because there are times when i can taste
the days in The Garden, and when i have my lips pressed
against what should have been paradise
but is now just inches away from perfect, i could taste it.
moments that will engrain themselves in the
wounds of my mind, sediment on the open flesh
each minute has its own scar, and with each scar a memory
only hoping every day that i can be called back home
to where my Father holds my cleansed hands and His
embrace is so sweet, while we look back on the perfect days
and He lets me cry in His arms for a life well lived
but more for an eternal chapter that begins by closing an old book.

151

David Harrity

Perishing Midwest Autumn

dear (Father)
divinity is too profound when there is nothing inside the fullness of my marrow
sucked dry by tedious anxiousness during the day and replenished by twilight gaz-
ing.
the emphasis.on being squared away
(repaired)and coaching out the demon
extruding the very cells from the skin.and a knout to flog it out of me
abuse is never ceasing and the swelling of my flesh is liberal
compared to the paleness it was once known for
(illness)the disease will soon be a horrible memory
rawness in the air reminds me
that autumn's destruction will bring winter's

{isolation}

and then(long awaited)
152 spring's full and lush, beautiful blossom
...that is what builds persistence;the end product
then facetoface with the devil|acunningadversary|i flounder and waiver in terror
breathe of new life inside a void hull
.....vacant emptiness.....
Teacher make into something i am not and never thought I would be.
inside Your hands is where i will sleep in holy sanctuary
until battle defies battle
these scars will never shake the trauma
this will be tattooed on my flesh, blood, and bone until time dilates into nothing.
if i am of any value.if my existence is wholly finished for any reason
if i am a creation of beauty(a mountain, a man, a beast, or blooming flora)
i know the guilty party, it is You.

And,

let's go for a walk in the moonlight and stars - in the silence and stillness of dark
down this beautiful path through the trees and the flowers
down this beautiful path while life changes around us
ever turning, ever changing, ever spinning, never again
one second to the next and you've lost it forever, you can never go back to that moment

so we sit - and make the most of this moment
legs dangling from the branches, laughter rising with the leaves
alone in my own little paradise of green

and the moments fly by

and there's no time, no time
life is too short for shallow friendships
there's always time, we must make the time to earn the trust and respect of true friends
and there's no time, no time
life is too short to put on our masks - to perfect ourselves on the outside
and there's always time to try - to try to fly
for it's not the fly that is success, but simply the try

153

so much wasted time, doing useless pointless things
yet some of it well spent
experiences - pain, joy, wonder, love
to sum it all up - life

and i dare not: step out of my own little comfortable world
who knows what's lurking in wait for me?
and i dare not: be completely, entirely myself
what if they don't like me?
and i dare not: fall in love
what would i do with a broken heart?

and life goes on

time does not flow, nor does it slowly drip - it falls in torrents
yet, once in awhile the occasional drought

when they ignore me
laughing and talking with their friends
i wonder why i even bother

and then he smiles
his eyes twinkling - joy is contagious
he sings and plays with his little sister perched on his lap
he loves to make her laugh
- and then he smiles
and all is right with the world - again

no
don't cut me up to see what's inside
don't poke and prod me to get a reaction
don't try to figure me out
i am myself! that's all i know
i'll tell you all i know

and they look so pretty - but are they real?
let's go take a break from the world

154 let's go for a walk in the moonlight and stars - we can find joy for the night
the sparkling sky smiles from above
and it says -everything is alright-

and she sits so alone - alone with her thoughts, observing the world around her
but no, she would never participate in it
that would be asking too much of herself
so she longs to be part of the world, yet she secludes herself
out of fear and loneliness - too sorry for herself to live her life
alone, isolated

but i, a zebra - i stay with the flock, for fear of the lion
security in numbers and confusing patterns

peace - somehow in the slums of mexico
peace - surrounded by people i love, surrounded by God

and death comes, silently, quietly - slithering in the muck and grime
a snake, poised and ready to strike
but i know something, something he doesn't know
and i've already won

and time flies by, soaring past us, leaving us bewildered
but was it worth it?
it depends, if peace and joy are worth suffering and pain

and how i strive to be like Him
am i? i try
though it's hard to measure up to Perfection

and when all of life lies behind me and ahead is only each tomorrow
and i live for everyday because i know that it's my last
and i dance in the street just because it makes me smile
here is peace love joy - a life well-lived

oh, i don't ask for much
just want your basic cinderella story
for a knight in shining armor to sweep me off my feet, onto his white horse
and we fly into the sunset - we live happily forever after
and i wonder
is there a prince charming somewhere out there for me?
sometimes i think yes - and sometimes, i don't know

but what do i a frail little human know
of the ways of God
i, but a speck in a universe of unforgotten love
how could i think You would then forget me?
so i hold on, to the dreams You dream for me
and i leave the future in Hands stronger than my own.

Lia Angell

Luck of the Draw

'Twas early in the month of March,
A cold but lovely day.
I went with Dáibhí, Séan and Shane
To Bantry quay to play.

We talked a bit about the fair
Across in Skibbereen,
Where hawkers'd sell delicious sweets,
The cheapest we had seen.

Down at the water's blue-gray edge
We saw old Seamusín
The fisherman was crossing to
The quay at Skibbereen.

156 "Hallo there, lads! An' how are ye?"
Our Seamusín cried out.
"What are ye doin' this fine day?
What trick are ye about?"

"Fionbarra," said me good lad Shane,
(He's spokesman for our lot)
"And me and Dáibhí, here, and Séan?
We've just been on a trot

"Around the town, but don't ya know,"
He sighed to Seamusín,
"We'd much prefer to cross the waves
And go to Skibbereen."

"To Skibbereen? Why would ye, lads?"
His smile became a stare.
"Sure, Seamusín, today that town
Will have a county fair!"

"Yerrah, me Shane," the fisherman
Turned to our motley crew

"I'll take ye, but you know, me lads,
You've put me in a stew...

"I've only room for three," he said
"I'll have to leave one out.
You started it," he told our Shane
"Now settle it, ya lout."

Our Shane, he was the leader, and
He was the one to say
Which of us four could see the fair,
And who would have to stay.

He picked up four short sticks, and held
Them out for us to draw
And when we chose them, I could see
I'd grabbed the shortest straw.

"Fionbarra, we'll bring somethin' back
This evening from the fair,"
Our leader told me, as they left.
I tried hard not to glare.

157

That rotten day was far too slow.
I told my friend Siobhán
Of all my burdens; I'd been left
When all my friends had gone.

"Siobhán," I said, "my lot in life
Is hard." The girl agreed,
"'Tis tough to be the one left out,
I pity ya, indeed."

"Twas after tea, and getting late
'Twas time to go to bed.
My mother looked out at the sea,
"'Tis getting rough," she said.

I didn't listen; I was far
Too busy with my tale
Of how *I'd* not been given leave
To Skibbereen to sail.

Me father came in while I was
A-telling Mam my woes.
He stared at me, then slowly said
"That's how the story goes?"

"So Seamusín's your friend, he is?"
My father said. "I see.
The other lads went to the fair?
I've just come from the quay.

"One boat from Skibbereen capsized.
The ones who died were four
That boat was Seamusín's. Perhaps
Your luck's not all that poor."

*Key to pronunciation of Irish names:

Dáibhí: DOV-ee: Séan: SHAWN

Seamusín: SHOM-ush-een: Fionbarra: fwun-BARR-uh:

Siobhán: shov-AWN

Lia Angell

First Place Poem

Personless Person

Or

La Belle Dame sans Merci:

From the *Girl's* Point of View

My heart may break, but I must bite my tongue

I'm tangled in a lonely web of pride.

My selfishness won't let me act the young

Sweet innocent that people want. I hide,

Because I'm now a woman, not a child...

A solitary, hardened femme fatale.

The world sees me as careless, thoughtless, wild

But breaking hearts is no real joy at all.

My eyes well up at concerts, and I shake

To see the beauty of each gorgeous day.

If my blue eyes seem cold, it's no mistake...

Their harsh indifference keeps the tears away.

I cannot know myself; I've lost all joy.

How can I ever love, if I am just a toy?

159

Judge's Comments

Ms. Angell has managed to work the form-establishing a compelling cadence, enjambling here and there, opening the suggestions of the syntax-rather than being bound by it. The poem succeeds as well in its establishing a compelling and agreeable voice, a speaker whose observations are simultaneously serious and suggestive of play. This is delightful poem.

Stalking Houses

when she's walking on clouds of
nine different shades of complacency
(from dime-store happiness to
fashionable depression)
she stalks houses

in the afternoons
when the sunlight or turned down overcast
sky will cause the glass to play back her own
little her-
all blue jeans and feathers,
pens and braids

she keeps her irises
off the glass
instead choosing
to spin and spin
in the peripheral of a victorian
house lost in some trees
swallowed by some
cornfields

other days, when her jeans don't shine sky-like
and her pen breaks through the page and her braids
are tied and when liquid sadness drenches her feathers
she stalks houses
in the dark time just before
bed time
when she can see the lamps lighting coffee tables lined with
open books, pens and blank pages: timeless-always-modern relics she
can only see when the night opens the pupils and
swallows
the peripheral

so afterward
she can turn to her car
and slide into motion

The Silence of Stars

last night,
i laid outstretched on a roof
under a summer sky and
on top of four stories of deserted building

i stared up past the stars without blinking

I.
before long, the starry points of contention
began to waver -
they drifted listlessly on the surface
of the unnamed heavens as leaves
do on a still pond disturbed by
a small splash from
somewhere.

losing myself in the never colliding bodies dancing
on unseen tiptoes
i thought of the immense depth expanding
between each star, each galaxy,
dark depths poets can't even fathom,
a void empty of a hint of an atom
or a whisper

II.
her steps made
the rooftop rocks crinkle and forced my eyes to lose their focus,
halting the sublime music and the starry dance

without a word she laid down
her head nearer to my stomach than to my heart or mind
and her silent presence held the stars in place.

no matter how hard i tried
i could not resume the heavenly ball
instead
my mind wavered to thoughts
of the immense measures between galaxies

but this time without the sensation of space

Nick Hayden

Sesquipedalian

words resound like operatic orations,
a natatorium's vibrations,
nugatory noises conducive to connotations
despite dubious denotations.

It's galimatias of the grandest kind!
A gauche gallimaufry of alphabetic signs!
Alas! Alack!
The verbal rack
of word interred in aeons past!
I am fain to flaunt this
idioglossian resurrection,
but I've no typhlosis
to frustian's fulsome panticulation.

A logomachy
in reality
can only be
fought brutally,
for logically
all victory,
invisibly,
is cruelty-
a truly supersensual schiamachy.

My Chaubunagungamaug pedagogue,
living on Lake Chargoggagoggmanchauggagoggchabunagungarnaugg,
once said:
I expatiate with Ent-ish vigor,
ignorning all consuetudinary rigor,
not for Mammon, wherewithal, or sterling,
nor for any dulcinea or darling,
but simply because I figure,
I have a predilection for making words bigger.

163

Rebekah Burtness

Cafe California

The sounds of live music
Bounce off the brick walls,
Melting with low light
And dark wood.

...low murmur of voices
...occasional outbursts
of laughter...

We are busy tonight,
As is told by the clinking
Of coffee mugs
And tiny cookie-plates...

The night grows deeper...
Conversations become

164 The kind where
Bright eyes
And broad gestures
Are brought out.

...beautiful voices...
light breeze
from the ceiling fans...

all mixing to make
the coffee house
a place of refuge
from busy
nine-to-five.

Joel Jupp

Tamed

Just ask
cummings.
a sentence
can be made
into a bridle
and whip-
forcing
the
reader to
stop;
jerk and
break

when he does
not want
to.

i.
have.
felt. it.
myself.

and so I,
too, will
take the
reins in
hand,
pull back,
and ride the
wild stallion.

Joel Jupp

Sanctuary

My father never liked what happened
in the museum's international section,
where the world's idols display
before crowds of 'irreverent' spectators.
Religion, though he doubted he was very good at it,
should be more about seeking than staring.
So during our bus trips home, he would
moralize about the noisy children,
picture sparks, pointing fingers-
and even the free admission.
For every time he took me
on those early weekend mornings
to see a Buddha, Christ, or Ganesha,
he would always slip a few silver coins
into the museum's wooden donation box
as an act of worshipful devotion,
166 his weekly offering to the gods.

Though during his white-sheeted, bedridden hours,
the Talmud, Vedas, and Koran open on a table beside,
neither he nor I knew for sure where his faithful spirit would fly.
But wherever that 'blessed land' may be,
I'll certainly follow- for in these days,
I give a few coins of my own.

Joel Jupp

Two in Pink

Picking wild grape hyacinth
in the unkempt city garden
is how these widows escape
from the constant downtown hum-
of whizzing taxis, overblown radios,
after-school children, evangelists, worn bus brakes,
honks, open-cased musicians, and the 5:03 stampede...

They stop only to point at fresh rain
puddles, where frogs seemingly forget
their fly-catching cares to splash
in newly formed water playgrounds.
The women laugh, remembering giggles
And slippery grasps from their
Favorite childhood game.
And yet the friends, dressed in the same
white blouse and plain pink slacks,
never seem to notice the surrounding
overgrown grass, paint-peeled benches,
and the two rust-covered fountains.

Joel Jupp

Demythification (To the Pre-Socratics)

Kill fate. Kill gods. Kill sensation.
Drink, breathe, live, burn-
All part of the eternal flux.
Nothing new, nothing new.

But like the evolution of all things,
Even these beliefs will become water.
Dead.
Not all stars speak. Not all rivers move.
And so we believe.

Water flows. Earth erodes.
But this one truth remains:
Our salvation comes through story.

Joel Jupp

To a Waitress

I prefer my truth black-
without crème or sugar,
and serve it to me scalding,
because lukewarm comes too late.
But rather than a fresh pot,
scrape out what's left of the old,
and don't add water-
I want to chew those tarred grounds,
the way God intended,
and get them stuck in my teeth.

Scribbled Lines and X'd-out Spots

With every scribbled line and x'd-out spot
I wonder how one writes a villanelle.
The one who made it up should sure be shot.

This I could do it without getting caught?
Although he's prob'ly dead, I think it well
With every scribbled line and x'd-out spot.

I think I'll wonder 'til the day I rot
Or put it off and spike my hair with gel.
The one who made this up should sure be shot.

Although a lot of things will rhyme with "spot,"
I must admit that I am going to yell
With every scribbled line and x'd -out spot.

This work could be the whole of what I'm taught
Or just how not to write a villanelle.
The one who made it up should have been shot.

I think this room is surely getting hot.
I think this villanell will never sell
With every scribbled line and x'd out spot,
'Cuz any guy who'd buy this should be shot.

Natasha K. Fast

Mist of Heaven

The streetlights make the mist around them glow.
Tree branches, bare and still, like spider webs-
their edges faintly blend into the fog.
The mist upon the tree limbs turns to rain,
falls down-erratic, gentle pitter-pats
that break the holy silence of a town
embraced by slowly falling drops of heaven.

It's this and God and I alone tonight.

The fog-it brings to mind another scene
that's far removed from earthly sight and touch.
The fog-it's growing thicker-whisks me up.
The streetlights fade away and are no more.
The webs and pitter-pats are faint as dreams,
and heaven's drawing closer to me now.
This heaven is a place of mystery.
I see God's plans like tree limbs in the fog.
At times, I know they're tree limbs-I'm quite sure.
...But sometimes they appear like spider webs.

But when I feel lost in mists of doubt
and wonder if a heaven's truly there,
my fears and doubts are mellowed by the peace
and loveliness God grants in fall night mists.

No Words

Dear God, I have no words to say tonight.
Angry and bitter thoughts pound through my mind.
I'm begging for your love to hold me tight.

This wrestling with anger drains my might.
I'm craving peace and rest I cannot find.
Dear God, I have no words to say tonight.

Confused, I ask, "Why even try to fight?"
I cannot win a war when I'm so blind.
I'm begging for your love to hold me tight.

I'm in a land of gray, not black or white-
Afraid to be abandoned here behind.
Dear God, I have no words to say tonight.

172 I'm lost, alone, and wondering what's right.
And hoping that the Book of Life's been signed.
Just begging for your love to hold me tight.

But how could I have lost my faith and sight?
Do I trust less in God than humankind?
Dear God, I need not say a word tonight.
I'll simply trust your love to hold me tight.

Hope

You know, I'm just a little kid
But I live here on the street.
Every night I'm up for bid
And I obey or I get beat.

Yeah, I live here on the street
Near a hundred other thugs.
And I obey or I get beat
When they make me sell their drugs.

With a hundred other thugs,
I feel hell's fire every night.
But when they make me sell their drugs,
Flames fade to heaven's far-off light.

I feel hell's fire every night
When I'm hungry and it's cold.
Flames fade to heaven's far-off light
When I'm so sick I can't be sold.

When I'm hungry and it's cold,
And the customers are gone,
When I'm so sick I can't be sold,
I live to see the break of dawn.

Now that the customers are gone
I lie here on my mat and pray.
I live to see the break of dawn.
One day I'll grasp a sunny ray.

I lie here on my mat and pray.
Though every night I'm up for bid,
One day I'll grasp a sunny ray.
You know, I'm just a little kid.

Natasha K. Fast

Through Heaven's Seam

The post-noon sky was lazy blue,
my eyes were drooping shut,
when suddenly across the sky
a long, white line was cut.

I marveled at the sight of it.
It beckoned like a gift,
invited me to take a peek
beyond the plane-made rift.

I laughed, but then I sobered quick
and asked, "Well, why not try?"
I looked around, then raised my arms
and closed my doubting eye.

174 Now, no one every taught me how
to cross from here to there,
but when I opened up my eyes,
Earth wasn't anywhere!

I walked on diamonds. Lightning flashed
within green walls of jade.
I stood within a corridor
that led into a glade.

And in that glade, there stood a man-
he could have been my dad,
and yet he had the deepest eyes
as no man's ever had.

"You're welcome here. I'm glad you came,"
he said with gentle calm.
"I've always hoped to show you this."
His words were like a balm.

I didn't understand just then
whom I was speaking to.

I knew he was my closest friend,
but that was all I knew.

I spent the afternoon with him.
Those hours were full of worth.
Then, suddenly I heard my name
and woke up back on Earth.

Now, some will tell you what I saw
was no more than a dream,
but I am almost certain that
I'm been through heaven's seam.

Nicolette Solak

I'm Just a Statistic

married at 20
2 kids by 30
a divorce in the family
1 parent alcoholic and 1 smoked since his teens
my first child is dominant noticed on the scene
2nd kid stays home doesn't talk much
money enough to get by
on discount lunches
my husband works three jobs
I got through 9th grade
so in the ghetto
some neighbors in a gang
hear shooting and I get scared
who knows
I could die by a wrong time right place
stray bullet latest murder case and

176 just another statistic

David Miller

Open my Eyes

i, Poured out like water
my cup is full
It's you i'm after
my Pain is null

Eyes dry as salt
Tears never come
my Heartsrings' cold vault
The empty strum

i am drawn tight
Drumskin hollow thane
But You are my Might
i Trust in Your Name

Can my crippled soul
Dance before Your throne?
Won't You take the coal
Burn me to the bone?

i Will sing
Take joy so holy
You're my Everything
To honor You, i'll see

David Miller

Fears and Forgiveness

I never want to hurt you
A lightly used phrase
Expression of desire
The utterance of a fool

Is not every man in love a fool?
He fights himself and every promise made
And every word proceeding from his mouth
Black lies descending on his head

Clumsy hands afraid to drop your heart
War against myself i fear him much
My own great enemy grasps me by the throat
Whom do i hate but whom i must contend

178 Oh breathing being whose tears fall bitter rain
That sweet Deep Breath from Deepest Heaven's hailed
Your pain i bear and Holy tears i share
Our Maker make me clean as morning dew

Our Maker, make us clean as morning dew
And teach us Love so unconditional
Strength to endure, to know the path contrite
Compassion true, to heal the broken pain

Kathleen Skoburg

Tearing Petals Off a Flower

He loves me.
Last night
You said my skin was soft.
Your touch was softer.
He loves me not.
Today
The distance between us
Is an open meadow
And my body aches
From the imprint of your hands.
He loves me.
When we're together
Your body worships me.
My delicate layers slowly peeled away
Leaving me open and beautiful to you.
He loves me not.
Now I feel bruised,
Ripped apart and torn open.
Your touch always soft;
I'm broken from dashing myself
Against your hard heart.
He loves-

Kathleen Skorborg

Ophelia

water beckons
ever so softly
brush of water against sand
a compelling invitation
filling my head
leaving room for
no thought
only emotion

after six minutes
my hands look like
the bread dough
I used to make for him
white and soft and malleable
they float on the surface
while my heart

180 sinks
as a stone
to the river floor

Whitney Vanderwilt

Glissando....

When I began my Easy Beginners,
Learning note names
and bass cleft,
and treble...
Your fingers were deftly working the keys...
Chopin and Bach and Hadyn....
And you didn't notice me practice.
When I pecked out the tune to Little Birch Canoe,
Proudly, and fast....
You were memorizing....
Key changes in Beethoven's Fifth;
dynamics in Brahms...
You couldn't hear my song.
When I would play pianissimo,
because the wolves were howling,
You would crescendo, and crescendo, and crescendo...
Until my *piano* was drowned in your *forte*..
Like you forgot you were playing a duet.

181

Under your *forte*, it was hard to hear,
But I had learned....
To *glissando*....

Author Biographies

Lia Angell ('04) is an English Education major. Born and raised in Ireland, she plans to live overseas again after she graduates. She loves to travel, sing, paint, and to be involved in the arts in general.

Pages: 21, 52, 156, 159

Heather Michelle Baker ('03) is consistently thinking about something else. Today she's majoring in International Studies and English. Tomorrow she's moving to Tibet to climb a mountain and play with kids. Someday, someone will say of her, "She's an Artist," which will make Heather smile.

Pages: 128, 132

Taylor Birkey ('05) is just a die-hard Chicago native writing about the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. He dedicates all his flows to his drop-dead gorgeous sister, Kathryn Grace.

Pages: 18

182 **Elizabeth Boltz** ('05) is unfortunately called Lij. She loves second-hand hats and books, is fascinated by film, fashion, and Oscar Wilde, and personifies everything, including her TV, Jamie Oliver II. No one has ever told her she's cute when she's angry.

Pages: 80, 116, 120

John Bundick ('06) is a double major in Christian Education and Biblical Literature and has been lecturing on poetry since 2000.

Pages: 48, 138

Joe Cressman ('04) is a Mass Communication/Journalism major. He loves fall weather, reading, playing and watching soccer, and his dog, Sadie.

Pages: 61

Rebekah Denison ('04) is an English writing major with weaknesses for coffee, ice cream, and late night conversation. She likes surprises and doesn't make too many plans since God always seems to change them anyway.

Pages: 139, 140, 141, 142,

Elaine Friedberg ('05) enjoys driving with no shoes on, the smell of old books, cardio, and having her teeth cleaned. She gets annoyed; however, by hand gesture quotation marks, condescending people, and melodrama.

Pages: 143, 144, 146

Emily Glass ('03) is a mild-mannered, whimsical soul with limited social skills, good intentions, and a slight overbite. She majors in writing and hopes to publish books someday--if she can get away with it.

Pages: 75, 105, 118, 122, 129

Lana Gottschalk ('05) enjoys playing the piano, winter sunsets, reading in pajamas, silver hardtop Corvettes, and her niece, Madeline Grace. Edgar Allen Poe is her favorite author and François Auguste Renè Rodin her favorite sculptor.

Pages: 125, 126, 127

Bill Green ('04) is a junior English major, member of Rice Pilaf, and baseball fan. This is Bill's third year on the Parnassus staff. Last year he edited a fortieth anniversary book, and he is this year's editor.

Pages: 97

Amanda Griffith ('05) is a mass comm/journalism major. She loves sports, traveling, music and being with her family and friends. Her future plans include finishing college and getting a job in the communications field.

Pages: 92

David William Harrity ('05) is Writing major that enjoys writing, listening/playing music, and photography. One day he hopes to be a published writer with an established and successful writing career. He writes to understand and grow as a person.

Pages: 150, 151, 152

Brad Johnston ('06) is currently a freshman at TU. He knows nothing about his future but is satisfied knowing just that. He enjoys the finer things of life and hopes to live on the West Side after graduating.

Pages: 134,

Joel Jupp ('03) is a Bible and Philosophy double major. His interests include recording music in his home studio, ministering to the mentally handicapped, creating and recreating fictive poetry, and impersonating a fat man in a cotton beard and red suit.

Pages: 165, 166, 167, 168, 169

Maura Klopfenstein has published humor, news, and review articles in *The Express*, *Church Libraries*, *Fort Wayne's Journal-Gazette*, and *Mansfield's News Journal*. She is currently single.

Pages: 90, 170

Lauren Knapp ('02) is a Psychology major. In the future, she hopes to live in the Pacific Northwest and pursue a Master's in Counseling. It is her passion to help people discover their unique gifts and to encourage them to live the life Christ intended.

Pages: 70

Angia Macomber has taught in the Education Department at Taylor since 1999. She has a very good friend, (Mr) Bill Rosenthal in New York City, who still suffers post-traumatic stress symptoms whenever he wakes up to find a perfectly beautiful sky any Tuesday morning, like he did the day of the World Trade Center attack in 2001.

Pages: 115

Erin McGinty ('05) is an Art major. The beach is her second home, and she enjoys anything to do with the ocean and warm weather. Her inspiration comes from the beauty in God's creation.

Pages: 26

Daniel Peterson ('05) is a Philosophy and English Education major. Some favorite writers/thinkers: Fyodor Dostoevsky, Salman Rushdie, T. S. Eliot, Solomon, Aristotle, Martin Luther King Jr., Ani DiFranco, and Steve Jones. Some likes: food, sleep, people, animals, oxygen, the 2nd East sniff and neon colors

Pages: 100, 148, 149

184

Thom Satterlee is Faculty Advisor for Parnassus. He has never actually met Thaddeus Reade, but he does get spooked whenever he passes the former president's portrait on the first floor of Reade Center.

Pages: 130,

Leah Schvaneveldt ('05) grew up in Great Falls, Montana. Currently, she is majoring in Secondary English Education to eventually be a middle school teacher. Leah can often be found reading books, eating, and hanging out with her "cool" roommate Alicia.

Pages: 41

Derek Shields ('05) is an Environmental Biology major. His passion is getting outside into God's great creation. Derek also enjoys words and their ability to inspire and encourage.

Pages: 135,

Laurie Susen ('05) is an English Writing Major.

Pages: 108

Whitney Vanderwilt ('05) grew up in Salt Lake City and will be studying in Nairobi, Kenya for the remainder of the 2003 school year. She loves traveling, making her family laugh, Nerd Blizzards, and the Wasatch Mountains.

Pages: 121, 181

Leslie Anne Wise (05) sophomore music business major, finds herself in composing, performing, and listening to music, writing prose and poetry, and acting. Once graduated she hopes to attend graduate school and make a life in these areas with someone she loves.

Pages: 136, 137,

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